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STAR TREK BEYOND
THE PURGE: ELECTION YEAR
THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS

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ISSUE
426

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FEATURES

GHOULS ALOUD

12

It's time to meet a whole new team of GHOSTBUSTERS in PAUL FEIG's latest.

"BACK OFF MAN, I'M A SCIENTIST!"

18

STARBURST looks at the original team and their two cinematic outings.

KEEPING IT REAL

24

The 'BUSTERS weren't just restricted to the big screen, as we find out when we look at the hit animated series that followed the success of the movie.

BUYIN' MAKES ME FEEL GOOD

26

ECTO-1 isn't gonna run itself. See what paranormal paraphenalia the gang have for sale to keep those dollars coming in.

FISH OUT OF WATER

38

Pixar's long overdue sequel to their massive hit has NEMO return to aid us in FINDING DORY.

BIG TROUBLE IN DREAM COUNTRY

40

The world's greatest director takes on one of Britain's most beloved writers with his adaptation of THE BFG. Things are looking up...

ON THE ROALD AGAIN...

44

We celebrate the literary genius that was ROALD DAHL with a look at his amazing body of work.

TO BOLDY GO ONCE MORE...

48

J. J. may not be at the helm, but Kirk and Spock are back in a new STAR TREK adventure, our preview will tell you all you need to know.

BEYOND ROMULANS

54

As the alien race is back in the spotlight, we highlight some other similar beings from other popular properties.

VAUGHN ARMSTRONG AND CASEY BIGGS

57

We chat to the two former STAR TREK alumni about their careers outside of the show.

GOTHAM'S ONCOMING STORM

58

It's been 20 years since THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS, let's look back at the comic storyline and its impact.

ELECTILE DYSFUNCTION

62

Will the third entry into THE PURGE series win your vote? It's ELECTION YEAR, after all...

HORROR OBSCURA

65

Things get claustrophobic as we take a look at the low-budget indie movie CONFINED.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

69

This issue we profile filmmaker GRAEME CAMPBELL and find out about his film LEGEND OF BLACK DIAMOND.

TORCHWOOD TALES...

74

We chat to BIG FINISH director Scott Handcock about the DOCTOR WHO spinoff range of titles.

REGULARS

THINGS TO COME	8
BLUE BOX SECTION	23
Outside The Box	
Watching Doctor Who	
Waking The Dead	
Doctor Who Reviews	
GIRL FROM PLANET X	36
SAUCER SECTION	56
Subspace Relay	
Interview: Vaughan Armstrong & Casey Biggs	
CINEMA	76
Cinema Reviews	
DVD & BLU-RAY	82
DVD & Blu-ray Reviews	
AUDIO	90
Audiotastic	
Audio Reviews	
OST	
BOOKS	96
Brave New Words	
Coming Soon	
Book Wormhole	
Book Reviews	
COMICS	102
View From The Watchtower	
Comic Reviews	
Comic Strip	
ANIME	108
Anime-Nation	
COSPLAY	109
Cosplay Catwalk	
GAMES	112
Pixel Juice	
Games Reviews	
Retro Bytes	
Roll For Damage	
MERCHANDISE	122
Watto's Emporium	
EVENT PROFILE	124
TV ZONE	126
IT'S ONLY A MOVIE	129

48



40



62



STARBURST

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ISSUE
426

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to STARBURST Issue 426!

Back in 1984, you would have first heard Ray Parker Jnr on the radio, posing a question on your choice of personal safety when it came to the subject of the paranormal. We didn't care that he had allegedly ripped off the riff (easy for me to say), it was infectious and within a matter of days seemed to be literally everywhere. It was the best possible groundwork when it came to preparing the UK for the invasion of the comedy quartet that had already taken the US by storm – **Ghostbusters**.

STARBURST readers lapped up **Ghostbusters**. It was more than a comedy. More than one of those whacky eighties movies. It was a comedy for us geeks, and it had its own unique mythology that would easily transport across to animation, and the emerging world of home gaming thanks to the revolutionary (back then, at least) sound chip of the Commodore 64. We were all seemingly disappointed with their return a whopping five years later with **Ghostbusters 2**, but in hindsight was it really all that bad? I would argue that had we known it would be the last entry for 27 years we might have been a little kinder.

Since then the idea of **Ghostbusters 3** continued to haunt mags like ours like a '60s BBC presenter hanging around a primary school, yet strangely many of us freaked out when the return of this beloved franchise was announced – With a *gasp* all female cast. The first trailer merely seemed to pour petrol on the bonfire and now on the eve of the release there are as many dreading as are excited to see this new incarnation of **Ghostbusters**. STARBURST, overall, is just happy to see a new movie being released, and gives us the perfect opportunity to re-live the franchise that helped to define '90s genre cinema.

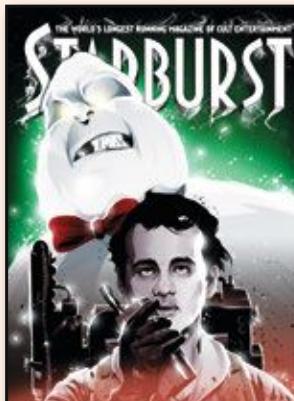
This issue is also important as I finally deliver on a promise made in these pages, and on the **STARBURST Radio Show**. I have always said that once **Star Trek** made the return to television we would launch a dedicated section. With the production of the new series underway, allow us to introduce you to your new source of Trek related news – **The Saucer Section**.

Is there actually room for anything else? Absolutely. **Finding Dory**, **The Purge: Election Year**, and the magical realms of **Roald Dahl** are all to be found within these pages – Together with all the regular content. It's an issue so tightly packed it defies the laws of physics.

Until next time, keep watching the weird and wonderful,



Jordan Royce
EDITOR



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FEEDBACK

You can write to STARBURST via snail mail:

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or email: letters@starburstmagazine.com

STAR

HIGH FIVE

Nearly five years after you relaunched the print magazine and here I am, struggling to think of a classic franchise that you haven't covered. And you've not only covered classic films/TV shows, but you've also showcased the esoteric and obscure spin-offs, the derivative stuff and so much else. Despite all that, I am confident that there is much more to come.

I confess I missed a few issues after your relaunch (shame on me!), so you may well have covered some things I am about to type, but for future issues, I'd certainly welcome coverage of the Scooby-Doo franchise, especially with the launch of the new DC title, GoBots, Masters of the Universe and The Lone Ranger (well, it's fantasy, isn't it?). On a general note, any issues covering ocean-dwelling TV shows/movies would be welcomed by me and I'd also welcome a wildlife-themed issue. Whatever you do, I'll be on board.

You must be the only sci-fi

magazine that covers EVERY aspect of sci-fi: films, TV, comics, cosplay, board games, video games, audio releases, etc. I'd planned to write to ask you to cover cosplay many moons ago, but, well, you went ahead and did it.

In an age where we can get news online, for free, never let the importance of a print magazine be understated. The news is fine, but what makes STARBURST work is the analysis and the looking back. Keep up the good work.

Stephen Parry, via EMAIL

Great minds think alike! Yes you did miss out - we ran a LONE RANGER Retrospective feature in issue 391 when the LONE RANGER film starring Armie Hammer and Johnny Depp was released in 2013 (BACK ISSUES AVAILABLE ON OUR WEBSITE).

'Ocean-dwelling TV shows/movies' is an interesting idea, and we are yet to dooby-do anything on SCOOBY-DOO, so perhaps in the future!

LETTER

GARETH THOMAS

Still gutted over the loss of Gareth Thomas, so I really appreciated your editorial and tribute article.

And I do indeed remember how big a deal BLAKE'S 7 was at the time. It was THE SF show of its era and we were all enthralled from start to finish.

Even if the liberator resembled (literally at times) a cardboard cut-out, it didn't matter since the acting and plots were so strong.

And how wonderful and fitting to think that Gareth had a hand in the continuation of STARBURST.

Blake lives!

Edward O'Reilly,
DUBLIN, IRELAND

BRIBING THE HADDOCK

Eddie 'the Haddock' Maddock here. Just wanted to drop you a quick line to say a massive thanks for giving me

the latest Star Letter in issue 425 (love that shiny foil logo) and the potential bribe of a free ticket to the STARBURST FILM FEST in August. Didn't expect that when I picked the magazine up in Smiths at the start of the week. I really appreciate the offer, though, and would hate to see it go to waste. Any chance you could offer the prize up again to the writer of next month's Star Letter or a similar deserving case? You can say it's courtesy of The Haddock if you like!

Many thanks once again.
Eddie, via EMAIL

Nope, you've missed the boat! The offer has slipped right through the net! It was sole-ly for you, Haddock!

OBSCURE SUGGESTION
I'd just like to give a big shout out regards your regular Horror

Obscura feature! They are always interesting and peculiar films that are chosen. The articles are always fascinating and shed light on a film that truly is obscure. Can I suggest you run a similar feature on obscure sci-fi films?

Might I suggest you scrap one of the many DR WHO features and replace it with this kind of article instead. These DR WHO fans have been indulged for too long now. The good Doctor should put them out of their misery (that last one is obviously a joke).

Maz, via EMAIL

Shauna says: Doesn't sound like a joke to me, it's a good suggestion!

We have done similar things in the past and are always open to doing more of it in the future, it's just that there is always so much content we want to include in the magazine it gets tricky!

Just wait a few years, DOCTOR WHO will have been cancelled, and no one will remember what it even is. The DOCTOR WHO features in the mag will then be the sci-fi obscurity - killing two birds with one stone!

X-CELLENT

Congratulations to your writer Andrew Pollard for at least attempting to straighten out the twisted world of the X-MEN comics for me. I can't say I'm any the wiser about a whole chunk of the late '80s/90s period, but the mammoth two-part feature was a joy to read and made me miss the days of Chris Claremont all the more. Bravo!

Jim, via EMAIL

Andrew Pollard is a marvel! He went into his writing room, put on his own version of Cerebro and produced that great feature! He's got a better head of hair than Charles, though.

Talking of hair, did anyone else notice James McAvoy's eyebrow hair extinctions in X-MEN: APOCALYPSE? He should have gone more extreme like in the animated series, if you ask us!



Hmm... maybe STARBURST should do a feature on sci-fi eyebrows... I can imagine the title now how about something like "Sci-brows"? "X-manscaping"?

We received a phone call with concerns over the content of last issue's Horror Obscura, from reader Tom Chetham. Assistant Editor and writer Martin Unsworth would like to add a personal message about the matter:

"I apologise that you seem to have taken offence with the light-hearted tone of the piece, but let me assure you that at no time was I inferring that the fantastic actor Mark Eden was a sex pest. I was simply making comment on how the character in the film's actions may be perceived in this modern 'political correctness gone mad' society. Thank you so much for reading and otherwise enjoying the magazine".



"Hang on luv, I'll have you out of there in a jiffy."

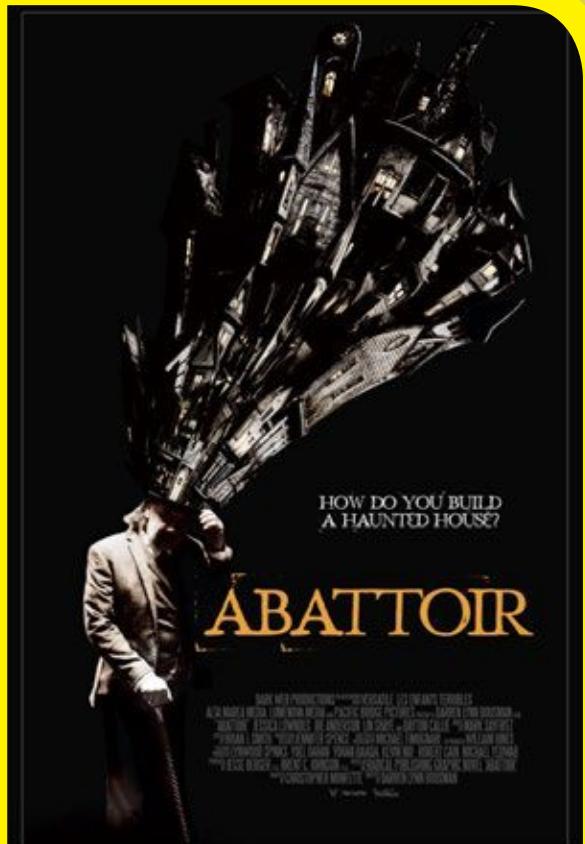
Winner: Leigh Dovey. Head over to www.starburstmagazine.com to enter this month's caption contest.

STARBURST

NEXT ISSUE: 427 ON SALE FROM JULY 15TH

THINGS TO COME

A ROUND-UP OF THE
BEST (AND WORST)
OF THIS MONTH'S
MOVIE / TV NEWS



The latest flick from Darren Lynn Bousman, the man who redeemed himself following *Saw II - IV* with the sublime **Repo! The Genetic Opera** and **The Devil's Carnival** (criminally still unreleased in the UK) tells the story of a man (**Sons of Anarchy**'s Dayton Callie) who is building a haunted house from rooms that have been the scene of deaths. Cult favourite Lin Shaye also appears. **Abattoir** is currently in post-production.

DC

By the time you're reading this, Warner Brothers' **Suicide Squad** will be even closer to release, with the face of Margot Robbie's Harley Quinn plastered in even more places than one would ever think possible. Post-**Suicide Squad**, though, there are already plans in place for Robbie's Harleen Quinzel to play a huge part in another DC ensemble piece. WB and DC have moved to get a Harley-fronted all-female movie off the ground. No details are known on just which characters will appear in the film, although Barbara Gordon and some form of the Birds of Prey team seem a shoe-in at this point. One would also have to think that names like Katana (played by Karen Fukuhara in **Suicide Squad**), Amanda Waller (played by Viola Davis in **Suicide Squad**), Enchantress (played by Cara Delevingne in **Suicide Squad**), Poison Ivy, Catwoman, Lady Shiva, Killer Frost, Huntress, and Black Canary could all be in line to be a part of this multi-person mash-up. As well as headlining the film, Robbie will

also be serving as a producer on this currently-untitled effort. All early indicators seem to suggest that the Australian has made a fine Harley Quinn, but we'll have to wait and see for sure when David Ayer's **Suicide Squad** hits UK screens on August 5th.

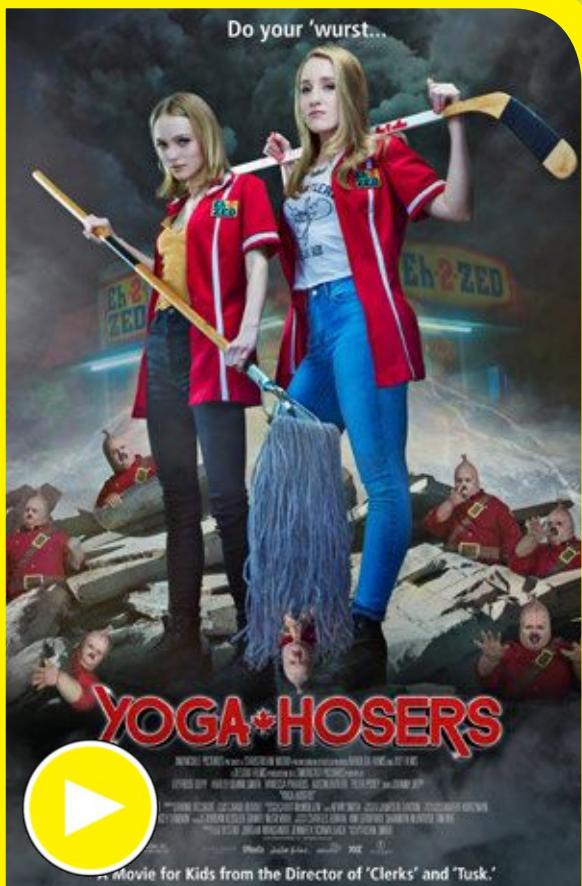
From one upcoming ensemble to another, and Jesse Eisenberg has this month talked about how he hopes that his Lex Luthor ends up having a part to play in Zack Snyder's two-part **Justice League**, which is currently shooting in the UK. For some of us (*cough* **STARBURST** Editor Mike Royce *cough*), we'd happily leave Eisenberg's Lex locked up for the foreseeable future, whereas others (somehow!) found a lot to enjoy with this new take on Lex. Eisenberg has yet to be confirmed as appearing in either of the **Justice League** movies at this stage, but the words of the actor seem to suggest he could well turn up in the coming together of some of DC's biggest names. In case you've been living under a rock, **Justice League: Part One** will see the formation of a JL team made up of Ben Affleck's Batman, Henry Cavill's Superman, Gal Gadot's Wonder Woman, Ezra Miller's Flash, Jason Momoa's Aquaman, and Ray Fisher's Cyborg. **Part One** is currently set for a November 2017 release.

Sticking with Ezra Miller's Scarlet Speedster, and **The Flash** has now found a new director. Following the departure of Seth Grahame-Smith over the ever-popular (and every-worrying) 'creative differences', **Dope**'s Rick Famuyiwa has been brought in to helm the Sultan of Speed's solo movie. With a script already in place from **The LEGO Movie**'s Phil Lord and Christopher Miller, the current plan is for **The Flash** to speed to the big screen on March 16th, 2018. As mentioned, Miller's Barry Allen will first be a part of **Justice League: Part One** late next year.

Remember those rumours last year of a buddy movie featuring DC's Booster Gold and Blue Beetle? Well, there's finally be an update on that particular project. When the stories initially reared their head, Greg Berlanti, who oversees shows like **Arrow**, **The Flash** and **Supergirl**, was supposedly being lined up to direct this team-up effort. Now Berlanti has moved to confirm that a Booster Gold movie is indeed one of the many pies that he's currently got his fingers in. Unfortunately, though, there was no mention of Blue Beetle from Berlanti, although this could be simply a slip of the tongue or it could merely mean that the current plans only call for a Booster Gold solo outing. Berlanti also talked about how he'd like Zack Stentz, who has worked with him on The CW's **The Flash**, to help pen the screenplay for the film. For those not familiar with Booster Gold, the long-time fan favourite was created by Dan Jurgens back in 1986. Initially from the 25th century, Michael Jon Carter travels back in time to the present day and uses his knowledge of future technology to become a cocky, sponsor-adorned, insta-smiling hero.

Moving things down to the small screen, and one of the biggest news stories of the month has seen **Supergirl** move from CBS to The CW for its second season. In last month's TTC we talked about how the Melissa Benoist-starrer was potentially in trouble, with CBS unsure over whether to renew the show for another season. Well, not only have CBS passed on the series, but The CW has picked the show up. Yes, as in The CW that is the home for **Arrow**, **The Flash**, and DC's **Legends of Tomorrow**. Grant Gustin's Flash has already crossed paths with Benoit's Maid of Might during **Supergirl**'s debut season, and now it looks as if an almighty crossover is on the way for December. The CW's Mark Pedowitz has already talked up plans for a mega crossover come the end of the year, with Benoit's Supergirl and Gustin's Flash to team up with Stephen Amell's Green Arrow and some of the other heroes that The CW's DC realm has at its fingertips.

One person who may get to either team with or butt heads with



After the rather batshit crazy trailer comes an equally wacked-out poster for Kevin Smith's follow-up to the bizarre but fun **Tusk**. Johnny Depp returns as Guy Lapointe, this time helping a pair of clerks (the actor's daughter, Lily-Rose Melody Depp and Smith's own offspring Harley Quinn) fight a horde of miniature Nazis that have been created from bratwurst (Bratzis! - played by the writer/director/podcaster himself). Where does he go from here? Well, the final part of the 'North Trilogy' is set to begin shooting later this year, **Moose Jaws**. Which we can expect will do exactly what it says on the tin. There's no official UK release date as yet.

Benoist's Kara Zor-El is Wentworth Miller's Captain Cold. Most recently seen as part of DC's **Legends of Tomorrow**, Miller has this month signed a unique deal that will see him appear across all of the network's DC shows. Miller's Leonard Snart first appeared in **The Flash** before becoming an integral part of Rip Hunter's Legends team. From the moment he was introduced, the cold, charismatic Snart quickly became a fan-favourite part of the CW/DC world. Now he'll be turning up in **Arrow** as well as **The Flash**, not to mention still making semi-regular appearances in **DC's Legends of Tomorrow** (which may take some explaining...). Will Captain Cold pop up in **Supergirl**, too? We'll have to wait and see.

What would a month be without some sort of word on a new DC-based TV show? Step forward, **Powerless**. Whilst a pilot for the show was long-confirmed, NBC has now moved to officially pick the series up for a full season order. The show itself is a 30-minute comedy series set in the greater DC world, with the premise centering on an insurance company that has to deal with the aftermath of the chaos, carnage and destruction caused by the superheroes and supervillains of the DC landscape. **High School Musical**'s Vanessa Hudgens headlines a cast that also includes Alan Tudyk, Danny Pudi, and Christina Kirk. Michael Patrick Jann will be directing the pilot and serving as executive producer on the series, whilst Ben Queen has penned said pilot and will also act as executive producer. The current plan calls for **Powerless** to air as part of NBC's 2016-2017 season of TV over in the US. AP

MARVEL

One of the greatest accomplishments of the Marvel Cinematic Universe was and is James Gunn's **Guardians of the Galaxy**. Taking a group of characters who the general public had no knowledge of and who even most comic book fans were vague-at-best on, the film was a rip-roaring success both critically and financially. With a sequel currently shooting, some new details have come out on the villain of Gunn's **Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2**. Elizabeth Debicki joined the film a little while ago, and we now know that she'll be playing Ayesha, aka Her/Kismet/Paragon, in the follow-up. What's most interesting about this is that the scientists who created Her also created Him... a character who would be known as Adam Warlock, who is somebody rumoured to be revealed as Peter Quill's father in the MCU. In the comic book realm, Ayesha would hunt down Warlock in order to create a perfect race. Currently set for an April 28th, 2017 release, **Guardians 2** will see the returns of Chris Pratt, Zoe Saldana, Dave Bautista, Bradley Cooper, and Vin Diesel as the titular team, plus returns for Karen Gillan, Michael Rooker, and Glenn Close, not to mention new additions in the form of Nathan Fillion, Pom Klementieff, Sylvester Stallone, and the legendary Kurt Russell (who had previously been rumoured to be playing Quill's pops).

In some news that has us all kinds of happy, Michael Keaton is once again back in talks to play Adrian Toomes, aka Vulture, in **Spider-Man: Homecoming**. The actor was in negotiations for the gig earlier this year before the former Batman pulled the plug on talks, reportedly due to Robert Downey Jr.'s Iron Man butting heads with ol' Webhead in the film. Due to Tony Stark's presence, Marvel Studios and Sony Pictures weren't sure how to move forward on the villain front, which saw Keaton decide against the project. Now though, it appears that all's clear for **Homecoming** to have both Iron Man and Vulture causing headaches for Tom Holland's Spidey. And in other Wallcrawler news, C-lister extraordinaire The Tinkerer will be assisting Toomes in making his Vulture suit using Chitauri technology obtained in the aftermath of **Avengers Assemble**'s Battle of New York. To be directed by **Cop Car**'s Jon Watts, **Spider-Man: Homecoming** is set for July 7th, 2017.

From space to Asgard via Queens, and there's plenty of new information this month on the Son of Odin's next outing, **Thor: Ragnarok**. With **Creed**'s Tessa Thompson previously confirmed for a part in the film, it's now been revealed that the actress will be playing the heroic Valkyrie. In addition to that casting news, it's also been revealed that Jeff Goldblum will be playing the eccentric Grandmaster, Karl Urban will be playing Asgardian meathead Skurge, and that, yes, as previously reported, Cate Blanchett is indeed playing Hela, the Asgardian Goddess of Death and the ruler of the realm's version of Hell. Plot-wise, new reports claim that a large part of the film will revolve around Chris Hemsworth's Thor on a journey to find a weapon that can put an end to the ominous prospect of Ragnarok; essentially the end of the world in Norse mythology. The same report also suggests that Hemsworth's Thunder God will sport a shaved head for a good portion of the film. With Mark Ruffalo's Hulk another who will be a part of **Thor: Ragnarok**, it's believed that the Thunder God's journey will find him end up on a planet that revolves around gladiatorial games. In case you can't see where this is going, this is where we'll find Ruffalo's Green Goliath in a way that loosely pulls from the fan-favourite **Planet Hulk** comic arc. Goldblum's Grandmaster will be overseeing proceedings, and, in a move that will get longtime comic fans tight in the pants, Hulk will be decked out in the armour that's seen in the **Planet Hulk** tale. To be directed by the brilliant Taika Waititi, **Thor: Ragnarok** is set for an October 27th, 2017 release.

Having made his MCU bow in **Captain America: Civil War**, things are starting to come together where the solo outing of Chadwick Boseman's T'Challa is concerned. Michael B. Jordan, best known for the likes of **Chronicle**, **Fantastic Four** (in which he was the only good thing) and **Creed**, has signed on to reportedly play a villain in **Black Panther**. Jordan has worked with director Ryan Coogler previously, with the pair having enjoyed their time together on the aforementioned **Creed**. There's no concrete details on just who the one-time Human Torch will play in **Black Panther**, although it's seemingly somebody who will be causing chaos for Boseman's King of Wakanda. This is in addition to the inclusion of Andy Serkis' nefarious Ulysses Klaw, who was introduced in **Avengers: Age of Ultron**. Jordan's isn't the only casting news for



the film this month, however, with Oscar winner Lupita Nyong'o reportedly close to signing on to play a love interest for T'Challa, with the role in question rumoured to be a member of the Dora Milaje, the group of all-female bodyguards who serve the Black Panther. Nyong'o, of course, wowed us all with her turn in **12 Years a Slave** before memorably playing Maz Kanata in **Star Wars: The Force Awakens**. At present, February 16th, 2018 is the date put aside for Coogler's **Black Panther** to hit screens.

Whereas we've already seen Chadwick Boseman's Black Panther in action, one MCU hero yet to make her presence known is Captain Marvel. With a confirmed solo movie for 2019, there's a Carol Danvers-shaped hole right now... although that is a hole that is seemingly close to being filled (easy now!). Oscar winner Brie Larson is in talks to play Danvers, with the **Room** (and **Scott Pilgrim vs. The World**, genre fans!) actress now the first choice of Marvel Studios and Disney. Previous names linked to the gig range from Katee Sackhoff to Chloe Grace Moretz to Ronda Rousey. On the directing front, Elizabeth Wood, who stole the show at Sundance this year with **White Girl**, has had talks to helm **Captain Marvel**. **Guardians of the Galaxy**'s Nicole Perlman and **Inside Out**'s Meg LeFauve are currently working on the screenplay for the film ahead of its March 2019 release. Before that, Captain Marvel herself is expected to débüt in May 2018's **Avengers: Infinity War** Part I.

Moving away from new faces, it could well be that we'll see the reappearance of a familiar one at some point in the future of the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Yes, we're talking about Wesley Snipes' Blade. It seems like barely a month goes by where the Daywalker doesn't get a mention in this column, and this past month saw Snipes again talking up the possibility of reprising the role that he last played twelve years ago (yes, that makes us feel old, too) back in 2004's **Blade: Trinity**. In fact, Snipes said that he's "sharpening his fangs" and that the ball's in Marvel's court. This is following regular comments from the actor that he's had several meetings with Marvel about doing something in the MCU, whether that's bringing back Blade or playing A.N. Other role.

Edging our way over to 20th Century Fox's Marvel properties, and a lot is starting to become clearer on James Mangold's **Wolverine 3**. Currently shooting, we now know that the follow-up the vastly-underrated **The Wolverine** will feature the villainous group known as the Reavers. But they won't be alone, for as well as having to tackle the group of no-good cyborgs (who were later depicted as gladiators), Hugh Jackman's Logan will also have to deal with the infamous Weapon X program once more. **Wolverine 3** is currently shooting, and the film is close to landing a new cast member as **Fear the Walking Dead** and **Orange is the New Black**'s Elizabeth Rodriguez is in final negotiations for a small but key role. If Rodriguez does sign on, she'll join a cast that features Patrick Stewart's Professor X, Boyd Holbrook as the 'big bad', Richard E. Grant as a crazed scientist, and mystery roles for Stephen

Merchant, Eric La Salle, and Elise Neal. Oh, and female Wolverine clone X-23 will also be along for the ride! Expect **Wolverine 3**, which will be Jackman's last outing as the Canucklehead, to arrive next March.

In one bizarre final piece of Marvel movie news, writer/producer Simon Kinberg is eager to do a **Fantastic Four** sequel. Yes, as in a sequel to that **Fantastic Four** movie. We've already vented and ranted about Josh Trank's FF film until the cows come home, so we'll be brief with this. No. Just no. Whether it was the horrendous script, the dour tone, the total basterdisation of one of comics' finest villains, the battles between Trank and Fox, or the simple fact that the film took home a paltry \$167 million from a \$120 million budget, please just leave it alone or let the cinematic rights for Marvel's First Family revert back to Marvel themselves. In fairness, Kinberg said all of the right things, mainly about how the film needed to be lighter in tone (you think!), but it all felt like nothing more than an apology that was way, way overdue in an attempt to try and win another chance from the loyal comic book fanbase that is out there. Consider us not fooled, not impressed, and in no rush whatsoever to see another 20th Century Fox **Fantastic Four** movie.

On the small screen, FX has ordered **X-Men** spin-off **Legion** for an eight-episode season. The show will start shooting in Vancouver later this summer, with the series set to air on the network next year. In the show, Dan Stevens plays the lead role of David Haller. The son of Charles Xavier, David has battled mental illness for years and has been labelled schizophrenic. Upon a chance meeting with a fellow patient, he soon comes to realise that the voices he's been hearing in his head may actually be real after all. Along with Stevens, the cast also includes Aubrey Plaza, Jean Smart, and Rachel Keller. **Fargo**'s Noah Hawley is acting as showrunner.

In some sad news, this past month has brought confirmation that **Agent Carter** has been cancelled after two seasons. For those clinging on to the hope of seeing Hayley Atwell's Peggy Carter once more, we can only hope that the MCU's propensity to use flashbacks at times may mean we'll get to see Peggy again at some point. That's not all, though, for the **Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.** spin-off show, **Marvel's Most Wanted**, has been canned before it's even began. That show was to feature Adrianne Palicki's Mockingbird and Nick Blood's Lance Hunter, but ABC has decided not to move forward with the series.

And in one final piece of Marvel news, Carrie-Anne Moss will be reprising the role of Jeri Hogarth for **Marvel's Iron Fist**. The character was a part of the Krysten Ritter-starring **Marvel's Jessica Jones**, and Hogarth will be using her legal expertise in the upcoming Finn Jones-headlined show. Jones will play Danny Rand, aka the titular Iron Fist, as he returns to New York to battle the criminal element corrupting the streets. To do this, he'll use his martial arts skills and the magical ability of the fiery Iron Fist. As well as **Game of Thrones**' Jones, the show will also feature Jessica Henwick as Colleen Wing, David Wenham as Harold Meachum, Jessica Stroup as Joy Meachum, and Tom Pelphrey as Ward Meachum. **Marvel's Iron Fist** will be on Netflix in the second half of next year. AP



horrorchannel

A round-up of what not to miss this month on Horror Channel...

JUNE 19TH - DON'T LOOK NOW (1973)

Donald Sutherland and Julie Christie are the distraught parents trying to come to terms with the drowning of their daughter in Nicolas Roeg's haunting classic. It's full of fabulous imagery, and has one of the most shocking climaxes in any film. It played as a double bill on its original release with **The Wicker Man**, so imagine how downbeat that cinema trip would have been!

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JUNE 20TH - TWIXT (2011)

No, nothing to do with a chocolatey biscuit treat, but a recent and overlooked flick from Francis Ford Coppola. Val Kilmer stars as a writer trying to solve a small town murder mystery with Edgar Allan Poe. It's a little bit of a mind trip, but fun.

+++

JUNE 27TH - STITCHES (2012)

Comedian Ross Nobles is a riot as a grumpy clown who is accidentally killed at one of his parties. Coming back from the dead, he takes his revenge on the teens who played a part in his demise. Some hilariously gory murders and wicked one-liners make this the perfect good time horror movie.

+++

JULY 13TH - CHRISTMAS EVIL (1980)

It's completely inappropriate viewing for the season, but this Santa slasher is still a whole load of fun. A toy worker is besotted with Yule, and dresses as the jolly fat man to punish those who he thinks are not keeping the tradition of good will. Keep an eye open for Jeffrey DeMunn (Dale from the first couple of seasons of **The Walking Dead**) as the red-suit obsessive's brother.

+++

JULY 16TH - EDEN LODGE (2015)

A couple and their new-born child find themselves stuck in the middle of a murder spree when they are forced to seek refuge in the eponymous guest house. Grim British horror that ticks all the boxes.

+++

Among the classic TV shows airing this month are the miniseries **Frankenstein**, starring former boy band singer Luke Goss as the man-made monster. William Hurt and Donald Sutherland lend some gravitas to the award-winning retelling of Mary Shelley's tale, directed by the legendary Kevin Connor (**At the Earth's Core**, **Warlords of Atlantis**, **From Beyond the Grave**). We also get another chance to get acquainted with Sheena, starring **Baywatch**'s Gena Lee Nolin, as the series is rerun from the very start.

Horror Channel is available on SKY 319, Virgin 149, Freeview 70, Freesat 138 and TalkTalk 487.

ROGUE ONE: A STAR WARS STORY

Gareth Edwards' **Rogue One: A Star Wars Story** is currently undergoing some reshoots. Whilst reshoots can often be an indication of some serious problems for a film, it's believed that the main reason for these reshoots is because of the cameo of a certain familiar/new face. Yes, we're talking about Alden Ehrenreich as the young Han Solo. Although it's also believed that the new stuff is going to be adding a bit more fun to the largely serious tone of the film. Additionally, new information is claiming that the film will end literally '10 minutes' before the events of the 1977 original **Star Wars**.

Set between **Revenge of the Sith** and **Star Wars** (or **A New Hope** for you younger sorts), the plot of **Rogue One** focuses on a group of Rebels on a mission to snatch the plans for the Death Star. Sounds a little familiar, right?

As well as a cameo from Ehrenreich's Han Solo, the film will star Felicity Jones, Ben Mendelsohn, Diego Luna, Mads Mikkelsen, Donnie Yen, Forest Whitaker and Riz Ahmed. Also, it's believed that the film will see an appearance from none other than Darth Vader. **Rogue One: A Star Wars Story** is set for a December 16th UK release. AP



DOC SAVAGE

It's now been confirmed that Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson will indeed be the titular role in Shane Black's **Doc Savage** movie. The news was confirmed by Johnson himself, who took to his social media accounts to give his thoughts on the role and why he's so eager to play the Man of Bronze.

The **Fast & Furious** star enthused about the character, pointing out that it pre-dates Superman (he originally appeared in 1933) and has many of the same qualities, only 'weirder'. No news as yet on a shooting schedule or release, but we'll be watching with interest...

TRANSFORMERS: THE LAST KNIGHT

Michael Bay returns with another clash of metal titans in 2017, and it's been revealed the film will have two heavyweights. The first being the return of the villainous Megatron, and the second the addition of the mighty Sir Anthony Hopkins to the cast. We've no indication of his role as yet (he may even just be voicing a Transformer), but it's an impressive name to sign up, unless you're of the mind-set that the veteran actor may be scraping the barrel for parts these days. **Transformers: The Last Knight** is set for a June 23rd, 2017 release.

AND FINALLY...

Bill Skarsgård (**Hemlock Grove**, **The Divergent Series: Allegiant**) is to play the clown that terrified a generation - Pennywise - in the remake of Stephen King's **IT**. **Mama**'s Andrés Muschietti is now on board as director following Cary Fukunaga's departure. After many problems and delays, the project is now back on and looking at a September 8th, 2017 release.

+++

No longer being made as a found footage film, the latest reboot/remeake/reimagining of **Friday the 13th** will now apparently be an origin story; although not the one we've come to be familiar with. The film is currently director-less, though, following the departure of David Bruckner. The script is in place, however, by Aaron Guzikowski (**Prisoners**). At the moment, the film is slated for a January 2017 release, so they better get their hockey masks on and sharpen that machete sharpened.

+++

Deadpool's T. J. Miller has been added to the cast of Steven Spielberg's adaptation of Ernest Cline's **Ready Player One**. He joins Tye Sheridan, Olivia Cook, Simon Pegg, and Ben Mendelsohn in the eagerly awaited cyber treasure hunt. It's currently due for release on March 30th, 2018.

TTC 426 stories by Martin Unsworth, Andrew Pollard. Edited by Martin Unsworth



GHOULS ALOUD

By David Craig



The 2016 reimagining of eighties favourite GHOSTBUSTERS is already steeped in controversy and has probably been written off by many. STARBURST has an open mind, however, as we find out what to expect...

The 1984 débüt is a film that, to this day, is seen as a benchmark for the action-comedy genre, and *Ghostbusters* soon became the recipient of a passionate fan base that wanted nothing more than another spooky adventure with the loveable gang of misfits. In 1989, their wish was granted, but few fans left *Ghostbusters II* feeling satisfied; the franchise has found itself in limbo ever since, keeping itself alive with two animated series, some comic books, a handful of video games, and a lot of fond memories.

For two and a half decades, *Ghostbusters* fans clamoured for details on a rumoured third film, but when news broke in the summer of 2014 on what form that third entry would take, reaction was divided at best. A *Ghostbusters* reboot that discarded the original team in favour of an all-new cast was always going to be a tough sell, one that would undoubtedly

have incurred the wrath of those who grew up on the much-beloved first film. But upon the realisation that the aforementioned new team would be comprised entirely of women, the backlash reached whole new levels of ferocity.

This becomes abundantly clear to anyone who had the misfortune of stumbling into the comments section of the 2016 trailer, where legions of fans gleefully tore this film to shreds to such an extent that it has now become the most disliked trailer in YouTube history. While some commenters had arguably valid points about the remake fever currently gripping Hollywood at the expense of numerous original ideas, it is quite clear that others were simply taking the opportunity to express their outdated and misogynistic views on the world.

As it edges ever closer to its mid-July release date, *Ghostbusters* now faces the uninviting task of rising above its detractors, and winning the hearts of audiences, while also raking in some of those sweet box office dollars. It's unenviable, but not impossible. If you can look past the tidal wave of hate surrounding this picture and its (admittedly poorly edited) trailer, what you find is a film that has assembled an impressive roster of talent and could well end up being the big surprise of this year's summer movie season.

Behind the camera is director Paul

Feig, a veteran of American comedy both on the big and small screen. He's had a hand in episodes of some of the most critically adored sitcoms of the noughties including *Arrested Development*, *The Office*, *30 Rock*, and *Parks and Recreation* while also creating the fan-favourite one-season-wonder *Freaks and Geeks*; the show that kick-started the careers of James Franco, Seth Rogen, and Jason Segel, to name a few. More recently, Feig has become something of a specialist in female-driven comedies, directing *Bridesmaids*, *The Heat*, and 2015's *Spy*, the latter two also giving him an opportunity to try his hand at action sequences. Simply put, a *Ghostbusters* reboot may well be a tough sell, but Feig has proven himself as a bloody good salesperson. The prolific director has also taken on scripting duties alongside his *The Heat* screenwriter Katie Dippold, herself responsible for some of *Parks and Recreation*'s strongest episodes.

The cast of the *Ghostbusters* reboot is just as impressive as its behind-the-scenes talent, consisting of four of Hollywood's biggest comedienne, two of whom Feig has directed in the past. Melissa McCarthy is arguably this film's greatest asset; her career exploded after a breakout role in *Bridesmaids* and she's been churning out comedy features ever since. Granted, not all of McCarthy's starring roles have been greeted with affection, but where



"You get your first bite of the apple watching a trailer. Everyone has a million different ideas of what this movie is going to be. I think a lot of people thought we were going to take the original script and just flip it so that Melissa's going to be Venkman and Kate's going to be Ray Stantz! Nobody knows what you're doing, so it could be anything. For us, we just needed to plant a flag and go, 'Here's kind of how some of the stuff in the movie is!'"

Director Paul Feig on the negative reaction to the first trailer.





she always seems to come up trumps is in her collaborations with Feig, with last year's *Spy* earning her a Golden Globe nomination for Best Actress - Comedy or Musical. McCarthy plays Abby Yates, an expert on the subject of the paranormal who once co-authored a book alongside Erin Gilbert (Kristen Wiig), which proposed that ghosts are real. Their book went largely ignored upon release and the pair went their separate ways, with Gilbert going on to become a professor at Columbia University. That is, until the book resurfaces years later and leads to Gilbert becoming a laughing stock among her peers, ultimately having to leave the university, choosing to reunite with Yates and form the Ghostbusters. Fans will no doubt notice the parallels between this film and the original, which saw the three founding members of the team kicked out of Columbia University in a similar fashion (although this reboot does not share the old continuity).

McCarthy has portrayed her fair share of oddball characters, but this appears to be one of her more level-headed roles. Yates expresses a sincere desire to save the people of New York from a threat that only the Ghostbusters could possibly go up against, displaying a passion for the paranormal not dissimilar to that of Dan Aykroyd's

Ray Stantz. Wiig, on the other hand, seems to be channelling Egon Spengler in her performance, and indeed, her character is cited as an expert in quantum physics, calling to mind a certain bespectacled science-addict from the first two films.

Also joining the new team is Kate McKinnon in the role of engineer Jillian Holtzmann, who appears to play a pivotal role in the creation of the Ghostbusters' iconic proton packs in this incarnation of the team. Holtzmann could be the reboot's answer to Bill Murray's Peter Venkman, taking the threat of the paranormal a great deal less seriously than her teammates; she goes so far as to prank Wiig's Gilbert in one of the more promising moments we've seen. McKinnon may not have quite the level of recognition that co-stars Wiig and McCarthy have gained in a post-*Bridesmaids* world, but having proven herself as a comedy talent to pay attention to on NBC's long-running *Saturday Night Live*, she certainly shouldn't be overlooked.

Just as Winston Zeddemore joined the team midway through the first film, the new Ghostbusters will also accept a late recruit in the form of Leslie Jones' Patty Tolan, who has quickly become one of the movie's most controversial elements. In the wake of that now infamous first trailer, social media was ablaze with claims that Jones' character was based on a racist stereotype

- and it isn't difficult to understand why. After all, every white member of the team is depicted as a brilliant scientist, while NYC subway worker Tolan is implied as being intellectually inferior, lacking knowledge in the so-called 'science stuff' while instead helping the team with her street smarts. It could be argued that this role is an homage to the original film's similarly working class hero, the aforementioned Zeddemore, and Jones herself has come out in defence of the character, questioning why a regular person can't be a Ghostbuster. These comments have calmed the fire a little, but many still feel uneasy about how this character may be depicted in the finished product.

Nonetheless, Tolan is set to play a major role in the plot of this reboot as the character who discovers the film's main threat. What threat is that exactly? At present, it isn't entirely clear. The villain has been revealed to be called Rowan, a powerful demon who is to be played by relative unknown Neil Casey. Rowan's plans for New York City, and indeed the rest of the world, have not yet been revealed although it's a safe assumption that it's nothing good. But before they can get to the big bad himself, the team will have to overcome ghosts causing mayhem





"I wore pants the whole time and my hair was up the whole time. Not one hair on my neck. It sounds like a small thing that I got to wear pants and have my hair up, but it's actually a really big thing because we were playing scientists. Women playing scientists wearing jumpsuits, kind of ugly jumpsuits. And they made dolls of this! This has never happened! No cleavage. Dolls."

Kate McKinnon on enjoying the jumpsuits of the film.



*"I cannot be more excited to reboot it. I mean, I'm a huge *Ghostsbusters* fan – who isn't? I've seen that movie, like, 50,000 times. To get to work on such a great thing with that group of women is a dream. I've known Kristen forever, and I know Kate and Leslie from *SNL*, so it's just going to be a blast."*

Melissa McCarthy on her initial response to rebooting a classic.



"Rowan is the ultimate loner. A regular New Yorker whose goal is to bring some things back to this world. So our villain, so to speak, is a very smart genius type himself."

Director Paul Feig teasing the Neil Casey's 'big bad'.



*"It was weird at first. It's funny because it becomes like another prop. When it's you speaking, and having not done it in a time, you're very much aware of it. It's in your head a little bit more. *Home and Away* was the last time I had to speak like this."*

Chris Hemsworth on being able to use his Australian accent in the film.



"You know, they were incredibly nice to ask me, and I really enjoyed being there. They have such a jolly group, and they are going to have great success with this project. I didn't want to overshadow or anything, and I feel really good about it."

Bill Murray on how it was the titular team that persuaded him to join the reboot.



"One of the reasons he did it, I think he liked the role we wrote for him. But he also just likes these actors and just wanted to be a part of it. And he didn't want to give any stamp of disapproval by not coming on board. It was really nerve-wracking and special."

Director **Paul Feig** on Bill Murray's cameo.



"The fact there was so much controversy because we were women was surprising to me. Some people said some really not nice things about the fact that there were women. It didn't make me mad, it just really bummed me out. We're really honouring those movies."

Kristen Wiig on the criticisms of having an all-female team.



"She's in charge of inventing all the cool stuff. The proton wand is undergoing a constant evolution. That's her role, to perfect these machines."

Kate McKinnon on her character, Holtzman.



"Why can't a regular person be a Ghostbuster? Regular people save the world every day so if I'm the stereotype then so be it. We walk among heroes and take them for granted. It's not a man, woman, race, class thang! It's a Ghostbuster thang! And as far as I'm concerned, we're all Ghostbusters! Stand tall!"

Leslie Jones responding to those who said that her character not being a scientist was a racist move.



"Never in my life will that be the response to me in shorts. It's crazy because they just show him in shorts and it's like 'Woo!' He's also smart and lovely."

Melissa McCarthy on Chris Hemsworth.



by possessing the human form. We've already seen McCarthy's Abby Yates falling foul to that particular fate, giving the film an opportunity to re-enact an iconic moment from *The Exorcist* for the millionth time.

Many have expressed concerns that this movie's plot could borrow heavily from the first without bringing much new to the table, in the style of other recent franchise revivals like *Jurassic World* and *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. The trailer did little to quash those fears given that it opens with a ghost confrontation in a library just as the first *Ghostbusters* film did all those years ago, while the aforementioned possession of Yates is reminiscent of the moment when Sigourney Weaver's Dana Barrett and Rick Moranis' Louis Tully found themselves taken over by the demons Zuul and Vinz Clortho. A rumoured appearance from the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man adds yet more fuel to the fire that this reboot could potentially lean too heavily on ideas from thirty years ago, but we'll have to wait until the release of the movie before we can definitely declare this to be the case.

The main cast is rounded out by Chris Hemsworth, who takes the role of the Ghostbusters' receptionist, previously filled by Annie Potts' Janine Melnitz. Hemsworth hasn't had a lot of experience in the comedy field, with last year's ill-fated *Vacation* revival being his first major foray into that territory. However, as the actor has struggled

to find a place for himself in Hollywood outside of the Marvel Universe - recent non-Marvel features *Blackhat* and *In the Heart of the Sea* proving to be utter flops - he may decide to take his career down the comedy path if *Ghostbusters* overcomes the odds and becomes a success. Hemsworth has shown some effective comic timing in the past, providing some memorable quips in his MCU adventures, and the scene in which his character Kevin helps design the *Ghostbusters* logo proved quite memorable.

Although it leaves the continuity of the previous two films behind, this movie will be tipping its hat to the first team through the use of cameos from the original cast (with the exception of Harold Ramis, who sadly passed away in 2014). Most surprising of these cameos is Bill Murray, who has been very apprehensive about the idea of a third *Ghostbusters* film for some time, but said in an interview that he wanted to appear to avoid people getting the notion that he disapproved of the project. Fellow surviving 'busters Dan Aykroyd and Ernie Hudson are also confirmed to appear, with Annie Potts also reportedly showing up to pass the torch. While none of these cameos can be regarded as major roles, it is reassuring that the original cast are so supportive of this new film as it implies that it may well exceed the expectations many fans currently have.

Did the world really need a *Ghostbusters* reboot? No. Could a *Ghostbusters* reboot be an entertaining watch? Quite possibly, especially with such a strong creative team attached both in front of and behind

the camera. It's difficult to figure out whether the people opposed to this movie are the majority of moviegoers or just a vocal minority; after all, it has been made known in the trailer's comments section that many people have created multiple YouTube accounts purely so they can dislike the trailer several times. As a result, the mountain of 'thumbs down' acquired may not necessarily be representative of the general public's opinion. Certainly, Sony Pictures will be hoping that this is the case, as with a hefty \$150 million price tag, this reboot wasn't cheap.

The bigger picture here is the unnerving feeling that the proposed boycott of the *Ghostbusters* reboot won't affect Hollywood's habit of remaking classic films, but instead could make them even more reluctant to produce female-driven blockbusters, which would be a great shame. Perhaps what is more concerning is that some of the Internet's more extreme comments imply that this is an outcome some people are actively striving towards. What makes this all the more disappointing is that, while unlikely to reach the lofty heights of the first film, this *Ghostbusters* reboot does hold some promise for those willing to give it a chance.

HOSTBUSTERS will be sliming its way into UK cinemas on July 15th.





"Back off man, I'm a scientist!"

A QUICK 'PHE' BACK AT THE CAREER OF THE GHOSTBUSTERS

by Ian White



It's the Summer of 1984. New York City is under siege. A bad-ass Sumerian God called Gozer has taken up residence on the roof of a Manhattan skyscraper and a giant and very angry Marshmallow Man is reducing the metropolis to rubble. When the Big Apple is quite literally going to Hell and the end of the world is imminent... WHO YOU GONNA CALL?



Luckily, actor, writer, Blues Brother, and *Saturday Night Live* alumnus Dan Aykroyd had the answer.

Aykroyd had always been fascinated by the paranormal. He had grown up in his family's haunted farmhouse and was still affected by an experience he and a friend shared while watching television. "We heard knocking coming from upstairs," he recounted, in the 1985 book *Making Ghostbusters*, "We went to the stairs and... saw these ectoplasmic tubes of light – shimmering patterns of iridescent green light that passed in front of us. We were so scared we ran out of the house."

Ghostly phenomena wasn't unusual in the Aykroyd homestead. Aykroyd's mother had been frightened by two spirits that materialised at the end of her bed, and his father had participated in a séance during which a talking trumpet reportedly 'flew around the room'. More worryingly, his grandmother had been thrown out of bed 'and bitten on the legs, ankles and arms by some kind of turbulent force'.

Aykroyd's relationship with the uncanny continues to this day. His former L.A. home, which was previously owned by singer Mama Cass, was haunted by a ghost that "...once even crawled into bed with me," Aykroyd told *iVillage* in 2003. When he eventually put the house on the market, he had to disclose that some 'unusual activity' had taken place on the premises "that could not be explained rationally or physically."

Aykroyd's inspiration for *Ghostbusters* was the parapsychologist Hans Holzer – arguably the first 'celebrity' paranormal investigator – who is probably best known for his controversial diagnosis of the notorious *Amityville Horror* house. When Holzer and his spiritualist medium Ethel Meyers threw out Ed and Lorraine Warren's claim that that the house was demonically infested and, instead, declared that the spirit of an Indian chief was responsible, taking revenge because the home had been built on an ancient Native American burial ground, Holzer paved the way for dozens of books and movies about cursed land and restless spirits. Aykroyd considered him 'the greatest ghost hunter ever'.

Ghost Smashers (Aykroyd's original title) was conceived as a vehicle for Aykroyd and his best friend and *Blues Brothers* co-star John Belushi. Aykroyd wanted to follow in the footsteps of vintage comedians like Abbott and Costello, Bob Hope, and Martin and Lewis, all of whom had made comedies about the supernatural. "I thought it would be great to write one for this decade," he explained when the film was released, "Parapsychologists have long been plagued by the fact that only one person in ten ever reports a paranormal experience. I thought, 'What if you advertised on TV or in the Yellow Pages and said, 'Hey, we believe you, we understand you'. That was the birth of the commercial enterprise of ghostbusting."

Aykroyd was writing the first draft when he heard that Belushi had died. "It was a terrible blow," he conceded, "but eventually, I came to realise that the picture really served any three guys." The third guy he'd had in mind was his friend and (later) *The Great Outdoors* and *Nothing But Trouble* co-star, John Candy.

Aykroyd gave the completed script to fellow *SNL* cast member Bill Murray, who recommended it to Ivan Reitman. Reitman had



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CINEMATOGRAPHY BY: DAN AYKROYD, HAROLD RAMIS
MUSIC BY: IVAN REITMAN



previously directed two of Murray's films, *Meatballs* and *Stripes*, as well as the horror comedy *Cannibal Girls*. Reitman's reaction was guarded. In this early version of the script, which was a lot darker than the eventual movie and packed with confusing 'technical words and phrases', the 'Ghost Smashers' were a time-travelling SWAT team who fought terrifying inter-dimensional entities with antenna-like 'nutrona wands'. "It took place on a number of different planets or dimensional planes," Reitman recalled, "There was very little character work in it. By the tenth page, I was exhausted. By the fortieth or fiftieth, I was counting the budget in the hundreds of millions of dollars. And there really weren't many laughs."

Aykroyd immediately began a top-down rewrite. When Reitman read the new script, he was struck by Aykroyd's 'brilliant initial concept – the idea of a group of men who work out of an old fire hall and respond to emergencies much the way firemen do'.

He suggested that Aykroyd needed a co-writer and Harold Ramis, who had co-starred in *Stripes* and co-written three of Reitman's earlier films, was encouraged on board. Columbia Pictures agreed to finance the project but stipulated a summer 1984 release date, which gave Aykroyd, Ramis and Reitman only a year to rewrite the script, shoot the film and rush it through post-production.

Aykroyd and Ramis decided to make the Ghostbusters "blue collar guys [who were] the captains of their own destiny." Peter Venkman (who might have been played by Michael Keaton or Chevy Chase if Bill Murray hadn't signed on) was the "huckster, the salesman of the team" whereas the "honest, straight-ahead 'mechanic'" was Ray Stantz (Aykroyd). Egon Spengler, Ramis's character (although Christopher Walken and Jeff Goldblum were also considered), was 'a human computer... a 'New Wave' Mr. Spock' who collects spores and fungus and once straightened out a Slinky. Winston Zeddemore (Ernie Hudson), despite having a larger backstory that was eventually jettisoned during rewrites, joined the team midway through the action and was (in Hudson's words) "just an average guy. These [other] guys have all their nerdy stuff and their scientific nonsense [but] Winston is just like, 'Dude, just pay me. Give me my money, tell me where you want me to go'." Meanwhile, it was Reitman who suggested that the Ghostbusters should be university professors.

As Venkman's reluctant love interest Dana Barrett, the no-nonsense musician who hires the Ghostbusters when her apartment is haunted and who is memorably possessed by the demi-god Zuul, Alien actress Sigourney Weaver was definitely out-of-the-box casting. "I auditioned with the possession scene and I really did get possessed," she said, "I jumped around the couch and started to eat pillows and turn into a dog."

It was fortunate for Venkman that Dana didn't turn into one of the movie's fearsome Terror Dogs, the massive hounds of hell who pursue Dana's terrified neighbour Louis Tully (Rick Moranis) across Central Park.

Effects Supervisor Richard Edlund, who had recently completed SFX on *Poltergeist*, used many of the ideas he couldn't fit into the film on *Ghostbusters*, but one of the film's most outrageous ghouls, 'Onionhead', was developed by Effects Artist Steve Johnson, who admitted in an interview that he was embarrassed by his original character designs. "To me, he was just a big smile with arms," Johnson remembered. Little did he know that 'Onionhead' would be rechristened 'Slimer' for *The Real Ghostbusters* animated spin-off and, thanks to that series, would quickly become as popular a character as the ghostbusters themselves.

Although the \$25 million budget rose to an estimated \$32 million by the end of the shoot, the movie would eventually take more than \$291 million worldwide. It was an unprecedented success and remains No. 28 on the American Film Institute's list of the 100 Funniest American Movies of All Time.

But what happened to Aykroyd's original title, *Ghost Smashers*? Well, nobody was happy with it. The problem was, animation studio Filmation had already produced a short-lived 1975 TV show called *The Ghost Busters* so they owned the rights to that name. Columbia still hadn't secured those rights by the time the first teaser poster was released, which is why the poster doesn't have a title and only features the iconic logo and the promise 'Coming this summer to save the world'. Eventually, in order to secure the *Ghostbusters* title, Columbia Pictures made a deal with Filmation that allowed them to make a later cartoon series if they wanted to. But more on that on page 24...

The film was nominated for two Oscars at the 57th Academy Awards - Best Visual Effects and Best Original Song but Ray Parker Jr.'s title track was quickly sued by musician Huey Lewis, when the latter claimed Parker's theme ripped off his own track, *I Want A New Drug*. The waters were further muddied when it was discovered *I Want A New Drug* had been used as part of a temp track when *Ghostbusters* was being edited. The dispute was eventually settled out of court. It's also interesting to note that Parker's lyric "I ain't afraid of no ghosts" heavily recalls the dialogue "I ain't scared of no ghost" from Disney's 1937 short *Lonesome Ghosts* but, hey, inspiration can come from anywhere, right?

The success of *The Real Ghostbusters* animated TV series (see page 24) was the core reason that Aykroyd and Ramis, at Columbia's urging, eventually agreed to write *Ghostbusters II*.

Although far from a terrible movie, *Ghostbusters II* was hobbled from the start. It went into production with a half-baked script that, despite the return of the four main actors and the key supporting cast of Sigourney Weaver, Rick Moranis, and Annie Potts (whose character Janine Melnitz would truly come into her own during the animated and comic book incarnations), had little of the wit and imagination that made the original movie so special. Bill Murray wasn't surprised. He had been the last holdout until the studio had 'waved too much money' in his face. Murray suggested the new movie should be entitled *The Last of The Ghostbusters* to ensure there could never be a *Ghostbusters III*.

When we re-join the Ghostbusters, times have changed. Venkman and Dana are no longer together, and Dana now has a baby from another relationship. Egon is back at the University and Ray and Winston are reduced to performing at children's parties.

Instead of Gozer, the film's villain is the Vlad the Impaler-esque Vigo the Carpathian (Wilhelm Von Homburg, whose lines were dubbed by genre favourite Max von Sydow). Vigo, who is trapped inside a painting, orders his servant Janosz (a scene-stealingly bizarre performance from Peter MacNicol) to kidnap Dana's baby so that Vigo can possess the infant's body during a New Year's Eve ritual and be released out of the canvas back into the world.

The film has one or two nice ingredients, most especially a fluorescent river of slime that courses beneath the streets of New York City and the compelling idea that the negative emotions of NYC's inhabitants are largely responsible for the dramatic rise in paranormal evil that threatens to kick-start the apocalypse. It's a fantastic story component that is also testament to Aykroyd's





interest in the supernatural, because the theory that unconscious negative emotions can have a violent physical impact outside of our bodies (manifesting themselves as poltergeist activity, for example) does have genuine roots in paranormal science. "We wanted to show that you cannot be bad to people without having it go somewhere. Negative energy has to find a place to settle," explained Aykroyd, while Ramis, who had a deep interest in Zen Buddhism, said "We started with the moral notion that negative human emotions have consequences. What we were working toward... was that everybody in New York would have to be nice or else the city would be destroyed."

It's a worthy and intriguing philosophy, but the film never quite works. Matters aren't helped by a cheesy ending - the citizens of NYC launch into a rousingly cheerful chorus of *Auld Lang Syne* which stops the almost-reincarnated Vigo in his tracks - nor by the return of Slimer, whose popularity in *The Real Ghostbusters* cartoon series secured him a smidgeon more screen time. Thankfully, most of the annoying ugly spud's scenes were edited out following a less-than-successful preview screening.

Unsurprisingly, *Ghostbusters II* was declared a critical failure. But it still took over \$215 million worldwide against an estimated \$37 million budget.

So, that's a brief overview of some, but by no means all, of the *Ghostbusters* story so far. The question is - what's ahead for Kristen Wiig, Melissa McCarthy and their all-female Ghostbusters crew, and will the new movie finally trap *Ghostbusters II* in the Ecto-containment unit where it belongs and restore the franchise to greatness? Only time will tell... unless, of course, you have the kind of ESP skills that would make Egon Spengler quiver, in which case you probably know already...



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KEEPING IT REAL

BY ED FORTUNE



STARBURST LOOKS AT THE SMALL SCREEN GHOSTBUSTERS SPIN-OFFS



1984's *Ghostbusters* was pretty much a hit with everyone, but when the movie was being made, no one really predicted how popular it would be amongst kids. Perhaps the heady mix of lasers, ghosts, swear words and Sigourney Weaver in a state of undress is what swung it, but repetition an entire generation of almost-teenaged geeks got sucked into the world of *Ghostbusters*. With a readymade of audience of kids, an animated TV series was inevitable.

The Real Ghostbusters came out in 1986, and was based on the movie but designed with marketing toys in mind, as were many kids' shows in the '80s, and a number of changes were made early on. For a start, the original actors from the movie weren't available to do the voices for the show. Ernie Hudson was the only one to express a real interest, eventually being unable to commit to the show's schedule.

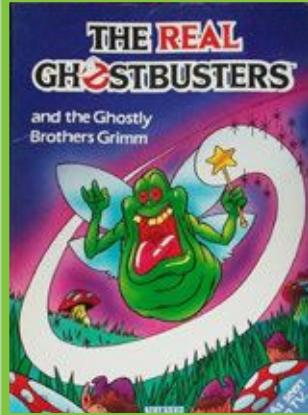
Because of this, the characters were redesigned so they were both recognisable to fans of the movie, but different enough from the actors to be their own thing. Stylised designs and colour-coded jumpsuits were just the first of the changes. In need of a mascot, the green blob-like ghost Slimer was added as a 'friendly pet', and the secretary Janine gained a more prominent role, as well as a romantic subplot with Egon. The 'pet' would eventually become the main star, with the fourth season onwards becoming *Slimer and The Real Ghostbusters*. Running seven seasons, there was even an eponymous mini-series all about the ghost.

The show itself was a hot bed of talent. Writers included *Twilight Zone*/*Star Trek*



The Ghost Busters (1975)

The Real Ghostbusters (1986)



writer Marc Scott Zicree and *Babylon 5*/Sense8 creator J. Michael Straczynski. The show's plot pretty much followed on from the movie to begin with, but upped the stakes from time to time. Throwaway references from the movie were used to expand the universe, with the likes of Tobin's Spirit Guide and Egon's interest in fungi eventually becoming important plot points. Pretty much everything seemed to be more powerful than Gozer, and the streams got crossed a lot, but that didn't put off the fans. Highlights included shows such as *The Collect Call of Cthulhu* and *Big Trouble with Little Slimer*, both of which mixed and matched traditional horror with the show's premise.

One of the things that seems to bemuse UK fans is the name *The Real Ghostbusters*. That's because some other guys called *The Ghost Busters* came first.

1975's *The Ghost Busters* was an American live-action kids TV show, featuring Larry Storch and Forrest Tucker. It also featured the legendary Bob Burns in a gorilla suit. Bob is better known to serious movie fans for his collection of movie memorabilia, including the original *King Kong* 18-inch armature model. Storch and Tucker were an American comedy duo, known for their slapstick antics and the like. The show saw a pair of bumbling detectives and their trained gorilla go out and investigate the paranormal. Presumably in an attempt to achieve legendary status in geek pub quizzes around the world, the two humans were called Spencer (Storch) and Kong (Tucker). That's right, the gorilla was called Tracy. Hilarious.

The team lived in a rundown office building and each episode started out in a way similar to *Mission: Impossible*. We'd get a pre-credits scene involving the monster of the week committing a crime and the team would receive a self-destructing message, before climbing into their broken down clown car to go and hunt the creature. The show lasted about eleven episodes, as it wasn't particularly good.

Filmation (the company who brought us many crappy '80s toy adverts masquerading as kids TV shows) owned the rights. So when the (utterly unrelated) movie came out, they cut a deal with Columbia Pictures. Filmation got a big chunk of cash (around \$500,000) and kept the rights to a TV series.

Keen to cash in on the success of a movie they never made, Filmation produced their own cartoon show, 1986's *The Ghostbusters*. This was slightly better than the live-action version. The show followed pretty much the same plot as the original show, though Tracy and Kong were recast as the younger sons of the original characters. The cartoon kept the same sort of formula, including the run-down HQ and rubbish car. It also featured a host of other characters designed with toy tie-ins in mind. With a total of 65 episodes, and despite being a cheeky money grab, it's reasonably fun, though not a patch on *The Real Ghostbusters*.

Another, slightly confusing *Ghostbusters* product was the official sequel to *The Real Ghostbusters* show, called *The Extreme Ghostbusters* (aka *Ghostbusters Dark*). This show came out in 1997, which probably explains its more sombre tone.

Set an uncertain number of years after *The Real Ghostbusters*, the original team has split up, mainly because they've busted all of the ghosts. Egon Spengler still lives solely in the firehouse, mostly to look after Slimer and conduct research. Of course, he discovers that the paranormal hasn't really gone away, and recruits a new team of young people to find the darkness. His new team consists of Goth girl genius Kylie Griffin; cynical slacker Eduardo Rivera; Garrett Miller, a paraplegic athlete and sharpshooter; and mechanic Roland Jackson. Janine and Slimer also got to be in on the action, with Janine pulling on a Proton Pack occasionally to do a spot of 'busting herself'.

The show only lasted 40 episodes, thanks to poor marketing and bad scheduling. Its slightly more mature tone, combined with character-driven stories, broadened its appeal, whilst keeping the same sense of fun the show is known for.

Though clearly an attempt to reboot the series with a more diverse and younger team, the only real-stand out from the show was the first lady Ghostbuster, Kylie, who remains a fan favourite and became a recurring character in IDW's *Ghostbusters* comic book series.

The Real Ghostbusters also enjoyed its own comic book series during the '80s. Marvel was responsible for the sequential art, and, of course, the UK version differed from the book by being weekly, so had a lot of filler articles. The strips weren't very good (the IDW series, which came out much later, is better), but it did provide early work for *Guardians of the Galaxy* writer, Dan Abnett. Dan wrote every single entry in the magazine's *Tobin's Spirit Guide* section.



Filmation's The Ghostbusters (1986)



The Extreme Ghostbusters (1997)

BUYIN' MAKES

by Jack Bottomley



As the GHOSTBUSTERS get ready to stomp through cinema city again, we take a look at the weird and wonderful merchandise the franchise has spawned.

After years of waiting, we are returning to the *Ghostbusters* franchise this year, however it is not quite the return we all expected. For sure some (OK, a lot of) people are feeling like they have been visually slimed by the footage for Paul Feig's reboot but you never know, we may all be surprised come July. Until then, stop getting your streams crossed and follow us, as we embark on another foray into the world of movie merchandise. And while some film series seem to shock you with their mad merch, we cannot say we were shocked to find something strange in the neighborhood of *Ghostbusters* gear. Though you may be more surprised to find that a great deal of *Ghostbusters* stuff is catered less towards Ivan Reitman's films, than the 1986-91 animated TV show they inspired, *The Real Ghostbusters*. So if you head to the store, and there's something weird and it don't look good, who you gonna call? STARBURST, obviously...

🚫 GHOSTBUSTERS HEROES FIGURES (Kenner, 1986)



Kenner's extensive *Ghostbusters* toyline was king of the market. However, their first was based on the hit *The Real Ghostbusters* - named as such to avoid confusion with Filmation's less popular *Ghostbusters* animated series (1986-7) - and ran as long as the series itself. Kenner put out ten waves of releases, but the initial set of Peter Venkman, Ray Stantz, Egon Spengler and Winston Zeddemore figures

(labeled under the *Ghostbusters Heroes* range) were the hottest of all and if you still have any of them (Venkman, especially) in good condition, they can go for a few hundred dollars at auction.

SURE it seems a tad lame now but back then many a kid would have fancied looking up to his or her own bit of *Ghostbusters* gear. For big fans only... see what we did there?

🚫 GHOST GRAB-A-METER (Kenner, 1990)



A lot of relatively simple toys were *Ghostbuster*-ised by simply adding 'Ecto' to their title (see Ecto-Headphones and Radio Blaster, 1989), however their Ghost Grab-A-Meter did not have such a luxury. Basically a variant on the age old toy claw, this grab 'n' fire toy came at a point when some things had been exhausted in the toyline and was hardly a piece of gear you could envisage any character whopping out to catch a ghoulie. Though Kenner really outdid themselves later, releasing a 'Ghost Nabber' - basically a big wand - in 1990... who ya gonna call? Harry Potter?

🚫 GHOSTBUSTERS CEILING FAN (Amercep, Inc., 1988)



What can you say? This was that extra little ecto-riffic addition to your bedroom,

🚫 THE REAL GHOSTBUSTERS PROTON PACK (Kenner, 1987)



Back in the '80s, any young aspiring Ghostbuster wanted only two things: a ghost to bust and their very own proton pack to bust it with. Kenner were only too happy to oblige, with this colourful proton pack toy. Kids, with the help of their Nutrona Blaster and P.K.E. Meter, could 'officially' be a 'Buster as the toy even came with an armband and ID Card. We just hope no kids actually went to tackle a real poltergeist problem with one. If anyone reading out there did, do write in and tell us how that went...

🚫 GHOSTBUSTERS THONGS (eBay, 2016)

When Sigourney Weaver's Dana Barrett said, "That's the bedroom, but nothing ever happened in there", and Bill Murray's Peter Venkman drolly replied "What a crime", that was one of the film's few saucy or romanticising moments. That said, we'd wager nobody ever imagined that one day their film would be used to sell sexy garments. With a pair of these, you'll be wearing even less than the ghosts!!



ME FEEL GOOD



GRANNY GROSS FIGURE (Kenner, 1988)

Some of the ghouls, ghosts and monster figures released by Kenner were, without doubt, stretching it, but one rather effective release was Granny Gross. As part of the Haunted Human series in the Fourth Wave, the OAP (Old Aged Poltergeist) was a spookily neat creation that had the looks of a sweet little old dear but was really a monstrous force... we think we may have met one or two people like this at the post office last week.



PLAY SHAVING KIT (DuCair Bioessence Inc., 1989)

Perhaps the closing image of *Ghostbusters*, in which the melted blown up marshmallow remains of the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man monster cover the cast, was enough to set light bulbs going in the heads of merch makers, "Hey, how about a kid's shaving set?" Other franchises have been blessed with DuCair Bioessence Inc.'s shaving sets and many kids do indeed pretend to be adults, only to ironically get to adulthood and wish they were kids again... hmm... sorry, lost our (ghost) train of thought for a minute then, anyways an unusual piece of merch.



SLIMER PIGGY BANK (Diamond Select Toys, 2013)

Slimer is the George Clooney of ghosts, albeit a tad less attractive; he first appeared in the original film then had a leadin role in the animated series. So naturally, the best way to capitalise on his star status is a piggy bank. It is quite a grotesque piggy bank but very loyal to his design in the film, though if the



design were entirely faithful your coins would just fall straight through, which is y'know, impractical.

FEARSOME FLUSH (Kenner, 1988)

Kenner has released its fair share of great *Real Ghostbusters* toys (some of which are listed) but there have been a few duds, from the rather insensitive Quasimodo Monster figure (1989's Fifth Wave) to the Screaming Heroes figures (which looked unsettlingly rude with their sucking-shaped mouths). However, one of the most head-scratching releases was this Fearsome Flush figure, which gives a whole new meaning to the term arse licker. It's basically a haunted bog with teeth and a tongue, "Generally you don't see that kind of behavior in a major appliance".



MARSHMALLOW BLASTER (Marshmallow Fun, 2014)



One thing *Ghostbusters* has encouraged is marshmallow-based products and a particularly explosive recent example is Marshmallow Fun's Marshmallow Blaster. Though a potentially good idea, it fired with mixed results and when it did, a high speed marshmallow is more dangerous than it sounds... we have the bruises to prove it.

SLIMER PIZZA CUTTER (Diamond Select Toys, 2015)

Slimer again and this time the piece of merch he's selling does make sense somewhat. The portly green scamp is quite a greedy beggar, so a pizza cutter in his honour seems appropriate.



design were entirely faithful your coins would just fall straight through, which is y'know, impractical.

CANNED GHOST (Columbia Pictures Industries, 1985)

Kenner released a Ghost Trap toy in 1989, which seems mighty silly but this officially licensed item from the year before is an empty can supposedly containing a ghost. An item like this can be looked at two ways: 1) A con. 2) A bit of fun. The box - or rather can - features some genuinely funny designs, with an instructions list and warnings. A can of air it might be (or is it?) but call us cautious, we still wouldn't want to open it.



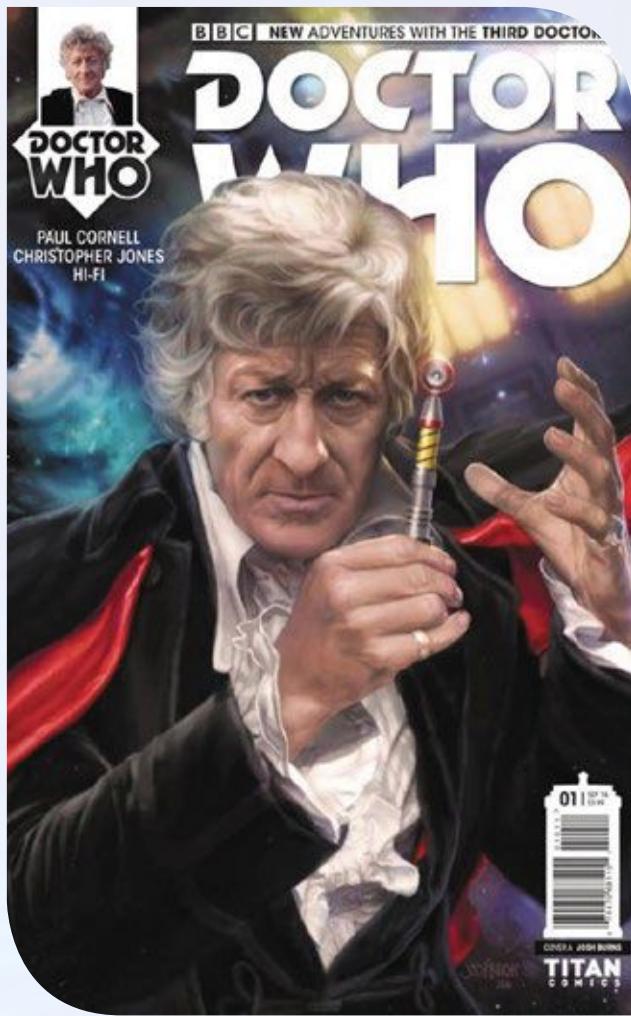
SCREAMING HEROES JANINE MELNITZ (Kenner, 1989)

As we are about to see an all-female cast take over the proton packs and ghoul traps, hearing about a highly questionable sexist toy from Kenner seems especially odd now. Many blasted the changes to the character of Janine Melnitz (the receptionist in the films) in the animated series, as she was turned from a stronger character in earlier series, to a bit of a stereotyped weak female later (apparently, as producers felt she was too abrasive and her glasses would scare kids... seriously) and this really bad idea for an action figure only anchors the point. The figure is a part of the Fifth Wave's Screaming Heroes line and when the 'spinning legs' function is activated, her skirt lifts as a result! Clearly the people who OK'd this were under the influence of Vinz Clortho or Zuul.



OUTSIDE THE BOX

ALL THE NEWS
FROM THE WORLDS
OF DOCTOR WHO
WITH KIERON MOORE



Paul Cornell Writing Third Doctor Comic

Titan Comics is knocking it out of the park with their **Doctor Who** ranges at the moment; not only are their Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh, and Twelfth Doctor ongoing series all worth picking up, but they've got the **Supremacy of the Cybermen** multi-Doctor event beginning in July and a rotation of mini-series featuring other Doctors. They've done the Eighth, they're currently doing the Fourth, and now they've announced that the next mini-series will centre on the Third Doctor.

Starting on August 31st, this new five-part mini-series will be titled **The Heralds of Destruction** and will follow Jon Pertwee's dapper Doctor, alongside Jo Grant and the Brigadier, as they investigate an extraterrestrial object that has crash-landed in Bedfordshire, leading up to a "pitched battle against a terrifying invader". The series will be written by **Who** stalwart Paul Cornell, who most recently penned last year's **Four Doctors** crossover event, and will be illustrated by Christopher Jones. Cornell has been very critical of the Pertwee era in the past, so it'll be interesting to see his take on it.

Series Ten Snippets

Showrunner Steven Moffat has revealed some new information about 2017's Series Ten, mostly related to new companion Bill. Despite her retro costume having led to rumours about Bill being from the 1980s, the Doctor's new sidekick is a thoroughly modern gal – "She's wearing what young people are wearing now. *I know that, because Pearl chose her outfit herself,*" explained Moffat. In addition, Moffat reckons the character's introduction will be different to what's gone before – "*How we first encounter her, and how we first encounter the Doctor next year, is very unusual for us.*" A further hint is that, while we won't necessarily meet Bill's family, "*we'll meet people around her.*"

There's also some news about the series structure – Series Ten will comprise of twelve episodes, the first and final three of which will be written by Moffat. Unlike last year's Series Nine, the focus will not be on two-part stories; there will be some two-parters, but most episodes will tell individual tales. And, of course, before that there's this year's Christmas Special, which will not feature Mackie, but will have a guest companion instead.

New Storybook for Christmas

Over in the world of prose fiction, a listing has appeared for **The Twelve Doctors of Christmas**, a collection of short stories featuring Doctors Hartnell through Capaldi, all based around a Christmas theme. The stories will feature "timey-wimey mysteries, travels in the TARDIS, monster-chasing excitement and plenty of Christmas magic" – which all sounds like a nice stocking filler for fans young and old! The hardcover volume will be released on October 6th.

Did You Missy Me?

Michelle Gomez has confirmed that Missy (or 'the Master', as some fans may know her) will return for Series Ten. The Scottish actor revealed this news at MegaCon in Orlando, during a Q&A session in which she also stated that her ideal episode would involve a shirtless Peter Capaldi and Missy snogging Captain Jack. We can't report whether those last two things will come to pass, but the character's return comes as no big surprise, as Gomez's cackling performances have been a highlight of the episodes she's appeared in. Her incarnation of the Doctor's old frenemy first appeared throughout Series Eight, and was last seen in Series Nine's *The Witch's Familiar*, abandoned on the planet of the Daleks... perhaps we'll find out what her 'very clever idea' was.





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WATCHING DOCTOR WHO

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK
AT THE WHONIVERSE
BY JR SOUTHALL



The number of people online calling out for a black or female Doctor is increasing every time a regeneration is on the cards, although in truth the proportion of viewers actually proactively seeking such a change is probably just the smallest fraction. By giving us a female Master and including a gender and ethnicity swap regeneration in *Hell Bent*, Steven Moffat has probably, rather cleverly, deferred the urgency for such a change in the Doctor himself, rather than paved the way for it, by chipping away at the pressure the BBC are no doubt experiencing from people insisting upon it. The BBC are an organisation with a Charter and a publicly-funded remit, however, and at some point the calls for a female Doctor are going to tip the balance; it will happen. Not because people want it en masse, but because the willingness to make such a change – and send out such a powerful signal – will outweigh the resistance against it. This decision rests with the BBC rather than the showrunner, after all; decisions this big are

rubber-stamped by the people who provide the money to make the programme rather than those who write it. But if Chris Chibnall were to tell the BBC he'd like a woman Doctor, chances are that rather than deny him the opportunity, the organisation would probably be happy for him to go ahead. The same goes equally for an actor of an ethnic minority; it's going to happen sooner or later, whether that tiny percentage of viewers who think of themselves as fans want it or not.

Quite rightly, too. I will admit that I'm more comfortable with a white, male, British actor playing the Doctor, because that's how it's always been and it's so easy to settle into a complacency about such things. But just because something hasn't happened before doesn't mean that it shouldn't, let alone that it can't, and it struck me some time ago that the best way to shake me of that complacency would be to force me to deal with it by making the change and obliging me to embrace it. So bring it on.

The tide is shifting in fandom, too, as the objection to a black or female Doctor diminishes gradually towards an acceptance that if it's going to happen one day, so be it. There will always be those who claim they'll switch off should it happen, but their number is probably rather irrelevant anyway; curiosity will bring new viewers to their sets and as long as it's done sensitively and intelligently, and we've no good reason to suppose that the people making *Doctor Who* will do it any other way, those new viewers might well find that they like what they see.

There's one taboo that very rarely gets talked about and might for some even be a change too far, though, and it's a sticking point that seems surprisingly mild next to the idea of a gender or ethnicity swap. What would Fandom make of the idea of the next Doctor having an American accent?

For a lot of people, the Doctor – this eccentric alien who travels throughout all of time and space – is an Englishman,

or at the very least British. The first six Doctors, including Liverpudlian Tom Baker, spoke very much in the Queen's English that was prevalent on British television at the time, and when Sylvester McCoy turned up and gave the Doctor a Scottish voice, the complaints were generally not so much about his accent but his acting. Paul McGann was next – another Scouser – and it's his appearance in the TV Movie that's relevant to the arguments both for and against, in spite of the modern Doctors including both a Northerner and a Scot, each of whom have had an impact on the tone of the series they've been starring in.

The main argument that the Doctor should always be played by a Brit seems to be that the identity of the series would be lost were an American cast instead – or at the very least if the Doctor were to be played with an American accent; the idea of an American playing the Doctor with a British accent seems marginally less troublesome. When Philip Segal was looking for an actor for the short-lived American revival in 1996, he was most insistent that whomsoever he cast be a Brit, eventually settling on the aforementioned McGann. Other names in the frame included Rowan Atkinson, Eric Idle, and Anthony Head, but no Americans – although there was talk of casting the Canadian Donald Sutherland in an earlier attempt to bring an alternative *Doctor Who* to the screen. Perhaps casting a domestic actor as the Doctor in 1996 might have nailed the TV Movie's identity in audience's minds as 'American', whereas with McGann in the role its character is curiously somewhere in between. The rest of the cast are North Americans, as are all the locations and settings, and certainly it looks and feels like a piece of American TV. But it also had a British writer and director and retains a vestige of the series' original sensibility.

The curious comparison is this: if the TV Movie feels 'British' in spite of



its American production, or if it feels 'American' despite its British writer and lead actor, doesn't that give lie to the idea that casting an American actor in a Welsh-based production of modern *Doctor Who*, with British writers and directors, British locations and settings, British supporting actors and companions and a British tone in every department other than the nationality of the leading actor, would ruin the series' individuality in the eyes of international audiences? Because the argument would seem to be that by casting an American actor as the Doctor you'd take away the programme's uniqueness in American eyes, and remove their reason for watching the series.

The obvious answer to this is that the Americans who already love *Doctor Who* are extremely unlikely to actually be put off from doing so by having a 'homer' playing the title character for a period. They might even enjoy such a turn of events, as long as the rest of the programme retained its 'uniquely British flavour'. Conversely, those

Americans who have yet to fall in love with the series might find themselves tempted into giving it a chance by having a familiar element at its head; audiences in the States would be likely to rise rather than fall by having an American Doctor.

More pertinently, it's the ethos of *Doctor Who* that people tend to love it for, rather than necessarily its nationality. The programme's 'Britishness' has more to do with its make-do-and-mend sensibility, its willingness to try for peaceful solutions – or, at the very least, off the cuff intelligent ones – instead of solving things by the use of brute force, and because the series avoids the military backbone of the likes of *Star Trek* and *Stargate*, in favour of the very British idea of a man who turns up out of the blue and gets involved in situations he has little to no foreknowledge of, solving them purely by the force of his wits. None of that would change if the actor cast as the Doctor were to be an American, an Australian or even a Frenchman rather than a Scouser, a mock cockney or a Scot.

We already have a great example of this sort of thing; Gene Wilder played the eponymous Willy Wonka in the 1971 film version of Roald Dahl's 1964 book *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, complete with an American accent, in an American co-production from a screenplay by Dahl but rewritten by the American David Seltzer, and filmed in Germany. Yet *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* certainly feels British enough, in spite of Dahl's protestations at the changes made to the story, being one of the most famous adaptations of his work and one that remains tonally faithful.

It's unlikely that we ever will have an American Doctor – not unless the Americans should take the format and retool the entire programme for a domestic remake, that is – so all this is probably moot anyway. But it would be very interesting to try and guess the reaction if Peter Capaldi relinquished the role and his replacement was announced as somebody like Alan Tudyk, Forest Whitaker, Gillian Anderson or even Angela Bassett.

ARTWORK BY SIMON BRETT





WAKING THE DEAD

Isn't it scary to think that as this piece is being written, it's almost exactly a good eleven years and one month after the original transmission date of *The Unquiet Dead*, Episode Three of Series One of the revived *Doctor Who*? But indeed it is so, making it the ideal candidate for re-examination here.

Christopher Eccleston's Ninth Doctor had by then already taken new companion Rose Tyler (former pop starlet Billie Piper) into the far future to witness *The End Of The World* after reacquainting himself with sinister shop dummies the Autons in *Rose*; Russell T Davies setting out his vision for the programme he'd worked so tirelessly to revive.

It had been decided relatively early on that following the future with the past would be a good move, and so first-time telly *Who* writer Mark Gatiss was asked to contribute something of a ghost story. Initially known as *The Cripplingwell Horror*, it allowed him to marry two of his great interests in both the setting and style of the piece - the Victorian period and his keen sense of the morbid put to good use!

Going by initial drafts of the story, it would seem the characters of Sneed and Gwyneth experienced something of a role reversal. Where in the final version of the story we see Gwyneth, a distant relative of *Torchwood*'s Gwen Cooper (Eve Myles playing both characters), getting chance to demonstrate her abilities as a clairvoyant, Sneed was initially to have been the one to make contact with the Geth.

They had been inhabiting corpses in a

bid to rediscover the physical form thought lost in the ravages of the Time War. The gaseous aliens manage to give young Mr Redpath quite a scare as his not-quite-as-dead-as-he-thought grandmother walks among the living once more!

Her destination will prove of great interest too. For 'tis Christmas Eve, 1869. Why the whole thing wasn't saved for a proper Christmas time screening and instead broadcast in April nobody knows.

Regardless, it does provide a useful template for all of New *Who*'s dealings with the past as well as offering the first celebrity historical since *Timelash*, in which Colin Baker's Sixth Doctor crossed paths with H. G. Wells. As one might expect given the implied season here, a literary luminary of a more festive hue is scheduled to bump into the leather jacketed man with the northern accent that he'd become three selves later.

The man in question is Charles Dickens,



played with relish by Simon Callow. Old Charlie is about to notice something very odd about a member of his audience for a reading of *A Christmas Carol* - not only is she 86 and a bit dead, but she carries an odd blue glow... good job someone suitably qualified to deal with that soon arrives; the Doctor quickly putting a damper on Rose's hopes of seeing a simple old-fashioned Christmas for herself. She does, at least, get chance to hear a street choir singing *God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen* - the carol used by Third Doctor Jon Pertwee as the basis for the tune of the Venusian lullaby used to put an Aggedor to sleep in *The Curse Of Peladon*.

Naturally, his words are nothing like the original! "*Klokleda partha mennin kletch. Haroon, haroon, haroon. Klokleda tirra irra nach. Haroon, haran, haroon.*" Which was, apparently, Jon's own improvisation. The 1760 original being somewhat more prosaic:

*God rest you merry, Gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay,
For Jesus Christ our Saviour
Was born upon this Day.
To save poor souls from Satan's power,
Which long time had gone astray.
Which brings tidings of comfort and joy.*

He had earlier dealt with Satan's power in a sense in *The Daemons*, Azal's race providing mankind with a basis for its depictions of the Devil himself, in a story inspired by Erich von Daniken's *Chariots of the Gods*.

All this is but a memory for the newest man to take the TARDIS key. He ain't afraid of no ghosts, and he'll prove it during a séance....

GWYNETH: *I can't help it. Ever since I was a little girl, my mam said I had the sight. She told me to hide it.*

DOCTOR: *But it's getting stronger, more powerful, is that right?*



GWYNETH: *All the time, sir. Every night, voices in my head.*

DOCTOR: *You grew up on top of the rift. You're part of it. You're the key.*

GWYNETH: *I've tried to make sense of it, sir. Consulted with spiritualists, table rappers, all sorts.*

DOCTOR: *Well, that should help. You can show us what to do.*

The spirits are as ever not to be trusted, mind. They even attempt to play the 'last of our kind' card on the last of the Time Lords, and it very nearly works before he sees through the ruse, which is later attempted in a similar fashion by the Silurian Alaya under his questioning within two regenerations in *The Hungry Earth*, though he won't fall for it again. "*I'm the last of my species and I know how it sits in a heart. So don't insult me.*"

An early example of his often dangerous unpredictability, which will

again come to the fore in the return of his oldest foe (or a surviving example, at least) in *Dalek*, as he comes close to torturing the last survivor of Skaro.

Somewhat conflictingly, *Boom Town* has him showing mercy to a Slitheen survivor following the events of *Aliens of London/World War Three*. A good stare into the very soul of the TARDIS, which has had a rejig in keeping with the spirit of rebirth that runs throughout what would be Eccleston's sole series, enables Blon Fel-Fotch Passameer-Day Slitheen to start afresh literally from birth after a quick pit stop at the aforementioned rift in Cardiff, something of a temporal weak spot.

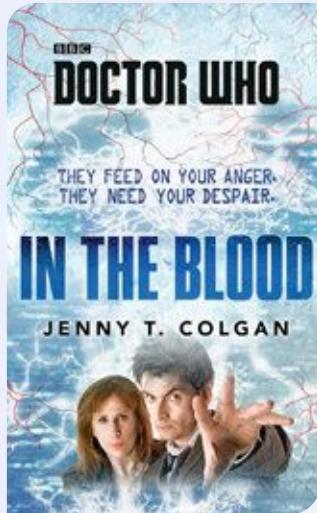
Cathartic change would soon come for the Doctor too, with *The Parting of the Ways* offering the chance for him to cast off his implied residual guilt as sole survivor of Gallifrey's destruction and begin anew. Fantastic!

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY



REVIEWS

THE LATEST
DOCTOR WHO
RELEASES REVIEWED
AND RATED



DOCTOR WHO: IN THE BLOOD

AUTHOR: JENNY T. COLGAN / PUBLISHER: BBC BOOKS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

To many who grew up alongside the revived Doctor Who, David Tennant is the definitive modern Doctor, and so this release, coming alongside the new Tenth Doctor audios,

is something to get excited about. Jenny Colgan's *In the Blood* fits into the timeline towards the end of Series Four, and sees the Tenth Doctor and Donna Noble return to contemporary Earth, where a strange affliction is making people hyper-aggressive before killing them.

Like many great Who stories, particularly those from the Russell T Davies era, there's a socially relevant, satirical edge – this affliction begins by preying on Internet trolls. Inspired by the intense aggression that can sadly be seen on any social network, Colgan pokes fun at all sorts of Internet users. There is a problem in the setting, in that the satire seems very 2016 but Donna's timeline necessitates that this is set in 2008 – web technologies have advanced a lot in these past years, and so the satire can at times feel slightly off.

This big concept, however, allows for big scale, and their investigation takes the Doctor and Donna on a journey from London to South Korea, then on to the jungles of Brazil. It's a fast-paced adventure with tense set pieces, the highlight being a scuffle on a train speeding out of control. Imagine a Russell T Davies two-parter but with the budget of a Bond movie – that's the tone here. The plotting sags a little in the final act, however, when two major villainous forces are revealed and their motivations aren't

entirely clear. It's also worth noting that you may want to listen to Colgan's audio *Time Reaver* before reading *In the Blood*, as a certain plot element ties the two together.

But the real highlight of *In the Blood* is the characterisation. Despite fan cynicism about Catherine Tate's casting, the Doctor and Donna very quickly became one of the most beloved pairings of the revived series. They were incredibly funny together, and from the book's first chapter, in which Donna gets kicked out of a spa for causing a robot masseur to explode, Colgan captures this perfectly; it's easy to read the dialogue in Tennant and Tate's voices. She also ties the story neatly into Donna's character development, providing a new step in her journey from unsatisfied temp to a woman confident in her ability to change the world. Plus, there's a characteristically lovely appearance from Wilf.

For fans of the Tennant/Tate series, then, *In the Blood* is a recommended read – though the plot isn't without flaws, it does have a cracking satirical concept and a globe-trotting sense of adventure, but most of all, it's a reminder of just how fun the Spaceman and the Super-Temp were.

KIERON MOORE

+++++ 7



CYBERMAN THE COMPLETE SERIES 1 & 2

AUTHOR: NICK BRIGGS, JAMES SWALLOW / PUBLISHER: BIG FINISH / STARRING: SARAH MOWAT, MARK McDONNELL, HANNAH SMITH, BARNABY EDWARDS, NICK BRIGGS, JO CASTLETON / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

To mark the 50th anniversary of the first appearance of the Cybermen in Doctor Who, Big Finish has re-released two series of stories in an exclusive nine-disc set. The set comprises four stories written by Nick Briggs and released in 2005, along with a

second series written by James Swallow and released in 2009. Although featuring the Cybermen, these stories don't include the Doctor; instead, they are slightly darker and are set within a continuity established in the Big Finish Eighth Doctor story *Sword of Orion*, also written by Nick.

The first four stories focus on the attempts to use forgotten cyber-technology to help humanity fight the Orion war against androids. Key characters are Earth President Karen Brett (Mowat), her military chief Liam Barnaby (McDonnell), android spy Samantha Thorn (Smith) and the mysterious Cyberman spy Paul Hunt (Edwards). Karen Brett's character goes from lead to puppet as she falls under Paul Hunt's cyber influence. This causes her one-time ally Liam to be labelled a traitor and he survives by joining the enemy in the form of Samantha Thorn. The plot all pivots around the search for a lost Cyberman tomb and a desperate last pitch fight to survive.

The second set of stories brings back Samantha and Liam and finds Paul Hunt now in charge of Earth. Not all is well and the plot is expanded with several new characters including taxi driver Hazel Trahn (Castleton). Here the plot is far more focused

on survival, as the Cybermen seem to have an unstoppable grip on humanity, and the androids are contemplating the next step in their quest for independence from both human and Cybermen alike.

As a set of eight instalments, the stories have some influence from Philip K. Dick (notably *Blade Runner*). They may not be essential listening for Doctor Who fans, but are worth checking out in their own right. They ask interesting questions about humanity, what it means to be human versus machines, ethical questions on how far it is right to go to win a war, and also cover one individual's short trip from everyday life to becoming a terrorist.

The soundtrack and theme music are also worth noting; the opening music is strident, powerful and eerie, and sets the scene perfectly for these adventures.

As pure pieces of hard-core science fiction, these are an excellent set of stories and ask some big questions while entertaining. What more could you want?

TONY JONES

+++++ 8

WHEN YOU'RE MARRIED TO A TIME LORD
(or possibly not),
YOU HAVE TO KEEP TRACK OF EVERYTHING.



ESPECIALLY AS IT MAY NOT ACTUALLY HAVE
HAPPENED TO BOTH OF YOU YET.



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BBC
BOOKS



LIVVY BOOTE is...

THE GIRL FROM PLANET X



Orphan Black - the various roles of Tatiana Maslany.

It's always the same. I hear about a 'ground breaking' new show, or a friend recommends a classic that I haven't seen yet. I'll settle down to watch it, expectations peaked. More often than not, yes, the show is very impressive - aesthetically beautiful, excellent acting and well written.

And then, I burst the bubble; after years of practice, I notice immediately that these shows need more female characters or that they ought to treat the ones that exist a little better, and quite frankly, I therefore don't enjoy them very much. I tell my friend this, albeit apologetically, and their excited face falls as they discover that their brilliant recommendation hasn't inspired the reaction they'd hoped for.

It's not as if I want to be so critical. I don't watch every movie or television programme just to announce that it's sexist. It just so turns out that the majority of media these days is. And whilst I could just tolerate it and not point out the glaring sexism, I'd rather not spend my life asleep to social inequality. It's been about four years since I became a recognised feminist, and I'm not about to stop now. That does mean, however, that most of the movies and TV series out there are incredibly infuriating to me, setting all the feminist alarm bells ringing.

Luckily, over the past few years we've seen some really great stuff with some awesome female leads - *Jessica Jones*, *Steven Universe* and *Zootopia* to name a few. But there's still the overwhelming sense

of male dominance on our screens. I've had enough of sitting down in the cinema to watch a team superhero movie, when only one of the team is a girl.

If you share this frustration, then you need to get on the *Orphan Black* train. This is a show that is focused on an all-female team - oh, and with a few token male characters.

The quality of this show is really extraordinary. Tatiana Maslany not only plays the fascinating lead Sarah Manning, but also her multiple clones. She demonstrates incomparable acting skills as she portrays several clones with convincingly differentiating personalities. Whether it be the soccer mom, the dread-locked scientist, or the transgender clone, she portrays each

of these wonderful characters as the complex individuals they are.

Orphan Black has an array of LGBT characters, same-sex female relationships (that serve as something other than the audience's sexual satisfaction) and gives us unbelievably believable female characters. And by that, I mean I can't believe how brilliant these characters are - how *realistic* they are. Maslany shows that strong women can be girly manicurists, police officers, or suburban moms. That women who suffer from severe mental illness and tragic pasts aren't evil. That women are varying, beautiful and strong.

It's refreshing to see such an exciting character range, when we're all so used to



Maslany as Alison Hendrix, the 'soccer mom' clone.

TV SERIES ALWAYS SEEM TO BE MALE DOMINATED. BUT THERE ARE EXCEPTIONS...



I love Star Trek, and I love Uhura, but having a practically all-male team gets tiring.

bland female characters standing on the edge of the action, occasionally providing sex for the male lead. And guess what? *Orphan Black* is just as exciting and enjoyable as any other show involving mostly male characters - in fact, I think it's a lot better than most shows out there.

For a little bit of context, the story goes like this: Sarah Manning goes to find her daughter, who she's left in the care of her adoptive mother. She's mixed up in some pretty dangerous drug rings, so she'd distanced herself for her family's safety. Then, as she arrives at the train station, she sees a woman, identical to her, jump in front of a train. Intrigued and terrified, she takes the woman's bag to inspect her identity - and in the process, becomes implicit in a messy conspiracy concerning genetic cloning.

It is so exciting and so dramatic. It's the best thing I've seen in a really long time.

The show deals with the ethics of human cloning, and how one would go about such an experiment. It examines how clones would react to discovering who they were, the conspiracy they were involved in - how a mother would protect her family, how a police officer would continue her job without interference, how she would react to discovering her partner is invigilating and experimenting on her. It is not just a show about how humans would react to knowing they were a clone

- but how a woman would react.

When I watch stuff like the *Alien* franchise or *Jessica Jones*, I get really excited, because they show a woman's approach to issues. Instead of providing a hyper-sexualised, characterless woman firing a gun with her boobs on show, we get a realistic depiction of how things would really go. Shows like *Orphan Black* take it a step further, giving us a range of interesting, convincing characters and their reactions to their environment. It's nice once in a while to see what a woman would do in the face of danger, rather than a guy.

That's not to say that women ought to act differently to men. It's pretty much scientifically proven that male and female brains are not wired differently. Men are not from Mars and women are not from Venus. However, it's not our nature that's different - it's the way we've been brought up. Women are nurtured to view the world differently, feel differently, and act differently to men. We're treated differently. So, as a result, depending on what the female character is like, they may very likely react differently in certain situations to a male one. As for myself, I wouldn't be like Arnold Schwarzenegger if I were being shot at - I'd probably be more like Melissa McCarthy. Or, for a more relevant comparison, I'd react like Crystal from *Orphan Black*, the beautician who learns to defend herself against her stalkers - and accidentally maces people.

I really enjoy the *Jurassic Park* movies, and I'm warming to *Star Wars*. But if you were to ask me what my personal best TV series and movies were, I would suggest things like *Sailor Moon*, the *Avatar: the Last Airbender* series, and *Orphan Black*. Not only are they just really bloody good, but they're things I can relate to, as a woman, and the female characters are treated properly (which is not to say they don't experience hardship). So yeah, I prefer them to *Game of Thrones*. Oooh, controversial.

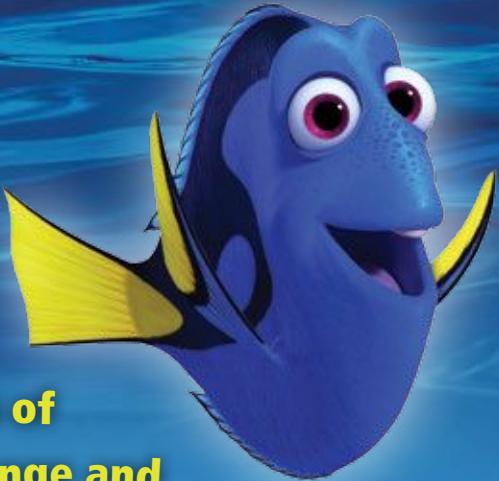
Netflix is a plethora of brilliant female-led shows and movies right now. If you've got the time and money, get an account, and add *Orphan Black* to the list. And *Orange is the New Black*. Oh, and *Jessica Jones*, of course. *Full Metal Alchemist* has some brilliant female characters, too, that's on there. *Attack On Titan* and *The Fall*, with the lovely Gillian Anderson. Aziz Ansari's *Master of None*, for important racial and feminist issues - and *Stonehearst Asylum* for some scary stuff and a brilliant take on attitudes towards women's mental health - I could go on. Basically, if you can, get yourself an account and marathon *Orphan Black*. The Season Four finale should have arrived on Netflix just as this mag hits newsstands.

Orphan Black had been at the top of my watch list for ages, and if I'm honest, I really should have started it when it first came out. It's one of the most well-written, addictive, feminist shows I've ever seen.

FISH OUT OF WATER

by Chloe Smith

Thirteen years after the massive success of the first film, DISNEY has taken the plunge and brought us a sequel; what can we expect from FINDING DORY?



When *Finding Nemo* splashed onto the big screen in 2003, it quickly became a favourite amongst fans and critics alike, particularly as it has a resounding 99% score on Rotten Tomatoes - and usually lands a very high spot on any 'Favourite Disney Film' list. But it's not just the film itself that fans take to their hearts, but also one of the film's least forgettable and most loveable characters, the blue tang fish Dory (Ellen DeGeneres). If it wasn't her hilarious attempt at speaking whale or her endearing life lesson (told through song, of course) to 'Just Keep Swimming' that made you smile, then her amnesia and its affects definitely made you cry, no matter how old you were when you first saw the film.

But when *Finding Nemo* came to an end, we left Nemo safe and content with his family and Dory very much seemed included in this happy ending. So when *Finding Dory* was announced as a new Disney sequel on Ellen DeGeneres' talk show in 2013, many fans, while being

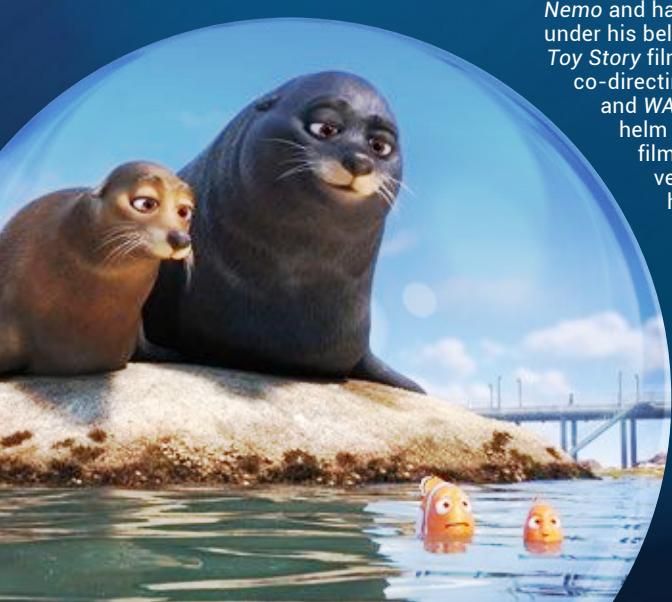
extremely pleased that one of their favourite Disney films and characters was to be revisited, also expressed a widespread fear around the mystery of what the plot would actually consist of - mostly, why will Dory need to be found? Well, here's what we know:

When the film's trailer was finally released, there was both a sigh of relief and a simultaneous amount of sobbing as it was revealed the film would not so much be a hunt for a lost fish like its predecessor, but instead a very metaphorical search for the character of Dory herself, as she longs to remember her past self, as well as to be reunited with her mother and father. This feature-length search will lead to some very familiar faces from the last film, as well as some brand new characters, who will all lend a fin in helping Dory on a search that will hopefully lead her back to her family, while also hopefully healing some of her amnesia and giving her back some of her memories. But will she manage to find that part of her past?

Andrew Stanton, who directed *Finding Nemo* and has other Disney classics under his belt, having co-wrote every *Toy Story* film as well as writing and co-directing the likes of *A Bug's Life* and *WALL-E*, will again take to the helm for *Finding Dory*; so the film appears to be in some very safe and knowledgeable hands. Stanton will not be directing alone, however, as Angus MacLane (famous for Disney short films such as *BURN-E*) will co-direct *Finding Dory* with him.

There is also a solid cast lined up for this sequel, including some familiar voices

such as Ellen DeGeneres as Dory and Albert Brooks reprising his role as Nemo's father, Marlin. The voice of Nemo will, however, be Hayden Rorlence - replacing Andrew Gould who voiced the character in the previous film, as his voice has deepened since *Finding Nemo* due to puberty. Not to worry, however, as Gould is said to have a cameo appearance at some point in the film's 100-minute run time. Co-director Stanton will also reprise his role as Crush the sea turtle, along with Willem Dafoe, who will be returning as Gill, the Moorish idol fish who was a tank inhabitant in the dentist's office alongside Nemo in the





first film. However, there are some new cast members that have recently been announced. These include Diane Keaton as Jenny, Dory's mother, Eugene Levy as Charlie, Dory's father, Kaitlin Olson as Destiny, a whale shark and one of Dory's old friends, and Idris Elba as Fluke, a sea lion. With a shining cast of both new and returning voices riding its wave, *Finding Dory* promises to have an array of very interesting voices and characters in its midst. One extremely notable inclusion, according to the film's credited cast, is Sigourney

Weaver (of *Alien* franchise fame) who is said to be playing herself. How and when

Weaver makes an appearance in the film is definitely something for the older fans to look out for!

One memorable element of *Finding Nemo* is definitely its settings - as it's hard to find a Disney fan who doesn't know the Sydney address that the characters are racing to. We can tell you that things are set to be quite

different in *Finding Dory*, though

- as we will not be returning to the sunny skies, calm seas, and terrifying dentist offices of Australia. This is because in *Finding Dory* we will instead see Dory and friends racing to the coast of California, as Dory remembers her parents talking of the location before they lost her; Dory's memory loss had caused her to forget that she had a family until the talk of sea animals migrating led her to suddenly remember.

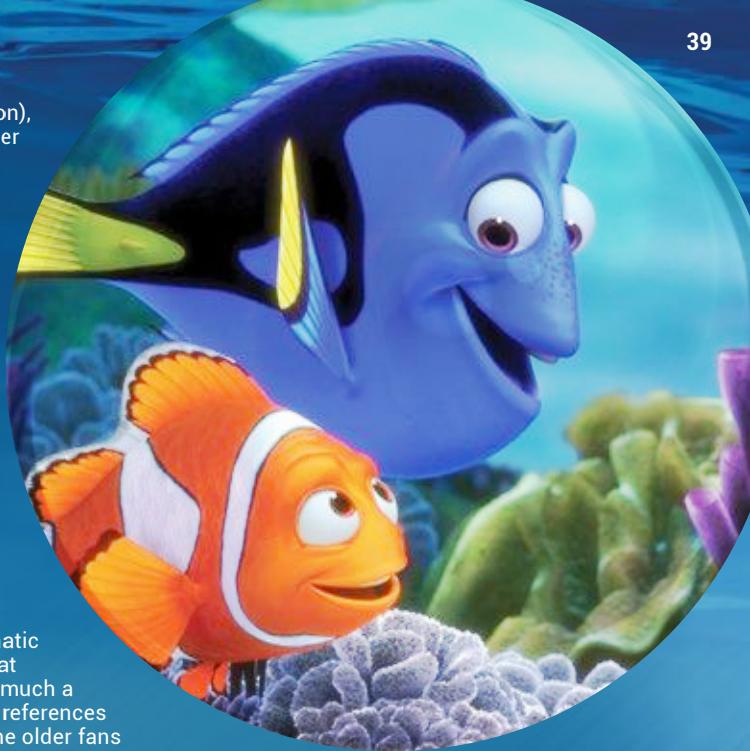
In terms of plot, Disney, as always, has kept most details under wraps, but from what we know about the film at this point - from characters going on a search for lost family, to the appearance of the surfer-dude sea turtles and a few sharks lurking in the midst, and even

Mr. Ray (Bob Peterson), Nemo's schoolteacher who takes Nemo and friends on a school trip which sets into motion the film's plot, *Finding Dory* seems to very much contain the same winning formula that its predecessor did. While the film is set six months after the events of *Finding Nemo*, but has been produced and is being released over a decade after the first film's cinematic release, it is clear that *Finding Dory* is very much a mixture of nostalgic references and call-backs for the older fans who grew up with a love for the first film and an entertaining story in itself for new fans. And hey, there's nothing wrong with that - it very much worked for the *Toy Story* films.

But that is not all *Finding Dory* has to offer. It is also set to showcase the same very beautiful 3D animation that can be expected from the very talented team at Disney Pixar, coupled with another extremely touching story. So while it may appeal to fans of the first film through elements of its plot and story, it also appears to pack the same heart that Disney and Pixar continually deliver in their films; whether you were a fan of its predecessor or not, *Finding Dory* will be a film with a whale of an impact emotionally, especially with a character like Dory at its forefront.

Because while it may have elements that are similar to the first film in the duo, there is something very different about it - this is Dory's story, a character who from even her first initial appearance on screen, captured the heart of fans and who is set to have character development and a backstory established in *Finding Dory* that many have been clamouring for, and that many can't wait to see established after so long. But one thing's for sure - now that the focus is on Dory - you're definitely going to want to bring some tissues in the cinema with you, because if we know anything, it's that Disney films, especially those revolving around characters like Dory, can make anyone cry.

FINDING DORY will splash into UK cinemas from July 29th.





BIG TROUBLE IN DREAM COUNTRY

by Robert Martin

The latest adaptation of a ROALD DAHL book comes to the big screen under the watchful eye of STEVEN SPIELBERG and is set to be the biggest film yet of a story by the late author. Will two rights equal a left as we meet THE BFG?



Film versions of Roald Dahl's work have been pretty good in the past, with Nicholas Roeg's *The Witches*, Danny DeVito's *Matilda* and Wes Anderson's *Fantastic Mr Fox* all capturing the humour and darkness of Dahl's stories brilliantly. Even if the remake of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* by the particularly hit-and-miss Tim Burton failed to garner great reviews, it had its moments, featured a bizarre but fascinating turn by Johnny Depp, and managed to pull in \$500million at the Box Office.

Expectations around this latest screen Dahl are as enormous as the BFG's ears, and not without reason.

A new Spielberg film is always something to get excited about. With three family-orientated films coming back to back with *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, *The Adventures of Tintin: The Secret of the Unicorn* and *War Horse* a few years back, the much-loved director then gave

us a couple of political powerhouse productions with *Lincoln* and *Bridge of Spies*, so his return to big budget FX-heavy blockbuster material is something to relish.

It's also his first time working under the Disney banner, the House of Mouse having so far managed to evade any collaborations with the world's most successful filmmaker. It's about time. Let's hope the studio allows the darkness of the story to come through; something Disney used to do in its heyday with the likes of *Dumbo* or *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, but which turned into a saccharine sentimentality that Spielberg himself has been accused of in the past – remember *Hook*? But Disney seem to have rediscovered the dark side thanks to Pixar's intelligent, unpatronising approach to family films, so the balance of wonder and menace should be spot on if they've managed to adapt the book into a faithful screenplay. Which brings us to another long-awaited collaboration.



The late Melissa Mathison, who sadly succumbed to cancer aged 65 last year, wrote the script for *The BFG* after a massive hiatus, her previous work having been for Martin Scorsese's *Kundun* back in 1997. Of course, it's not her first script for Spielberg, Mathison having written the Oscar-nominated lines that brought to life the characters of Michael, Gertie, Elliot and E.T. for one of the best loved and most successful films of all time. Few films have captured the wonderment of childhood as well as *E.T.* did, managing to be belly-achingly funny, genuinely thrilling and heartbreakingly sad, especially for anyone who ever lost a pet dog as a child. A huge part of that film's success is due to the inventiveness and honesty of Mathison's writing. It's unlikely that any script for a family film now would dare to include one child calling another 'penis breath'...

So, we've got a great director, a studio that's back on form and a script

that should be a corker.

Other collaborations bode well too. John Williams returns to score the film following a *Bridge of Spies* break from Spielberg, and two other regulars, Janusz Kamiński and Michael Kahn, are back to photograph and edit the production.

In the motion-captured role of the BFG himself, Mark Rylance - sorry, Oscar-winning Mark Rylance - is enjoying something of a Spielberg hat-trick. Having bagged the golden statue for his role in *Bridge of Spies* before donning the mo-cap suit for *The BFG*, he's also been announced as part of the cast for *Ready Player One*, which Spielberg is directing for a 2018 release. Spielberg does have a track record of using people he trusts repeatedly, as his long term collaborations behind the lens show, and the likes of Harrison Ford, Tom Hanks, and Tom Cruise put Rylance in very good company.

So far, it's a pretty male-dominated affair, but, for the first time since *The*

Color Purple in 1985, Spielberg's main character is female. Sophie, the child who befriends the BFG, is played by newcomer Ruby Barnhill who, aged 10 when cast, was paid \$85,000 for her big screen début, but stands to make a whopping amount more if the film hits big with audiences. Her contract reportedly ties her to a three-picture deal with DreamWorks, co-producers with Disney, with her salary rising to \$250k for film number two and \$400k for film three. That's some big effing greens - not bad for a pre-teen. But will she be able to carry this blockbuster on her small shoulders?

What we've seen doesn't suggest we've anything to worry about, Barnhill seemingly offering the confidently nuanced performance we associate with child actors in Spielberg's films. But obviously, we haven't seen too much of her so, whether she reaches the heights of Drew Barrymore, Henry Thomas, Christian Bale, or Haley Joel Osment remains to be seen.

The BFG Book

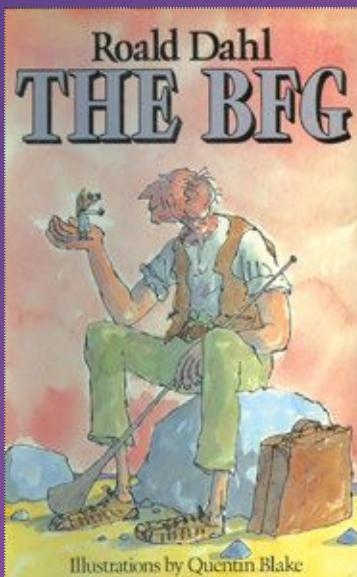
First published in 1982, *The BFG* is one of Roald Dahl's most beloved books, selling a whopping sixty million copies so far, a figure that's sure to rise massively once the Spielberg adaptation hits screens.

The story of a giant who gives dreams to children, and his subsequent friendship with a little orphaned girl, has all of the classic hallmarks of the Dahl canon, complete with fantastic illustrations by Quentin Blake, which have provided the blueprint for the look of the BFG in every adaptation there's been so far.

Like much of Dahl's work, the book mixes playfulness and joy with a dark and menacing threat, something which you can see developing as his work progressed. *The BFG* sits after *James and the Giant Peach* (1961), *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964) and *Fantastic Mr Fox* (1968) but before *The Witches* (1983) and *Matilda* (1988), in which levels of cruelty towards Dahl's young main characters become more and more wickedly exciting.

And therein lies the ongoing appeal of Dahl's stories and characters. In his fictional worlds, threat towards children is very real and young readers can feel the danger, a tradition which harks back to the Grimm's Fairy Tales. Thinking about a story as dark as *Hansel and Gretel* suggests where Dahl was getting his influences from. It's that combination of magical fantasy and genuine fear which keeps young readers coming back decades after these stories were first published. Threat, plus a lot of silly character names, bodily fluids, and fart jokes.

And whilst other children's authors have come and gone, the work of Dahl remains hugely popular, with the musical versions of *Matilda* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, film and TV adaptations of many of his books ensuring his legacy goes from strength to strength.



Certainly, it looks like the film remains faithful to the source. The story so beloved from the book all seems to be there in the footage we've seen. Sophie is an outsider who befriends the BFG, an outsider himself in Giant Country because of his refusal to eat children. Instead, he's a vegetarian, living off a foul-tasting vegetable called a snozzcumber, and feeds lonely children dreams at night through his giant horn. He introduces Sophie to Dream Country, where he harnesses the stuff of these dreams but, when other less friendly giants suspect that the BFG is hiding a child, things turn nasty. In a BIG way. Actually in a gigantic way, which even comes to involve the Queen herself!

Despite there being no sign of her majesty in the trailer (although Penelope Wilton is playing her), the elements from the book that are there appear to be absolutely bang on.

From the wonderful shot of the BFG reaching in through a window to take

Sophie to another of him blending in with the street he's on to avoid being seen, his dream horn covering the street lamp as he goes unnoticed, his trademark speed and acute hearing are in evidence. Shots from Sophie's perspective of her being carried away in the night are reminiscent of the shots of Naomi Watts on King Kong's shoulder, and our first sight of the snozzcumber does indeed look disgusting.

Most intriguing are the glimpses of Dream Country. Like Avatar's Pandora turned up to eleven, it looks like an astonishingly rich realisation of what a landscape made up of dreams might feel like. It's going to be a thing of beauty.

It's hard to know if the filmmakers have set it in a particular era. The man on the street who fails to see the BFG when he's right there behind him is wearing a hoodie and baseball cap, but most of the cars on that cobble street look like they're from the '50s, the street lamps themselves almost pre-war. Sophie herself gives



nothing away - her night dress could be Victorian or vintage, and the orphanage setting is classic so no clues there.

No sign of other acting talent including the fantastic Rebecca Hall, so brilliant in *The Gift*, and comedy favourites Bill Hader (*Trainwreck*) and Jemaine Clement (*What We Do in the Shadows*).

Or is there?

At the end of the trailer, we are introduced to a brief but proper look at the BFG himself and some of the other, less friendly giants. And there's a reason they are saved until last.

And that's because here's a film in which success or failure, much like the previously mentioned likes of *Avatar* and *King Kong*, will hinge on the motion-capture for characters who need to have just enough humanity to make them believable, but who are not human. So far this has worked, by and large, for characters who don't need to look like real people, be they blue and tailed Na'vi, an enormous hairy ape or Golem.

Of course, trailers are released way before a film is finished so we can't judge on potentially unfinished effects, and context plays a huge part in how we accept something in a film, so the brief glimpses on offer don't tell the whole story. Whilst Rylance as the BFG himself looks convincing, if a little weird, the other giants look less impressive, their features more exaggerated, less human, but also slightly less well realised. After such an impressive build up, the trailer ends with a bit of a let-down, the big reveal failing to provide the 'wow' moment we've been hoping for.

But let's not allow this to detract too much from the positives, which are numerous.

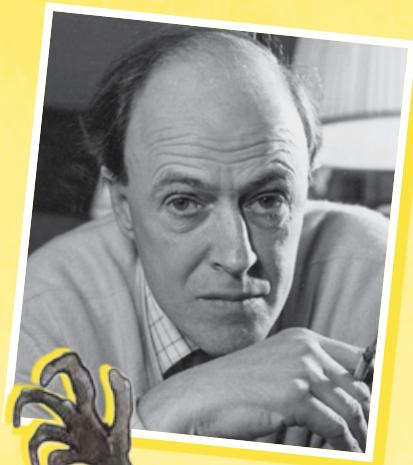
We'll be able to judge for ourselves in July when *The BFG* will be hoping to generate some Box-office Family Gold... Sorry, we just couldn't help it.

THE BFG is released in the UK on July 22nd.



ON THE ROALD AGAIN...

by Christian Bone



As Steven Spielberg brings **THE BFG** to cinemas, we take a comprehensive look at the illustrious and eccentric career of **ROALD DAHL** across books, TV, and film...

In 1943, at the age of 26, Roald Dahl had his first work of fiction published. It was, of course, a book for children. Titled *The Gremlins*, it drew on the writer's service in the Royal Air Force to tell the tale of mischievous little critters who sabotage Allied aircraft, although they are later convinced to team up with the British to take on Hitler and the Nazis together.

Originally, the book was to be made into an animated feature by Walt Disney, but the plan fell through, partly due to Dahl insisting on having the final word on production. This was Dahl's first brush with adaptations of his writing, though it would definitely not be the last. Interestingly, it is also thought that the book is responsible for the now-common presentation of gremlins in popular culture. So, on top of everything else, we have Roald Dahl to thank for Joe Dante's classic Christmas movie. Who knew?

It wasn't until 1961, nearly twenty years later that another children's novel by

Dahl found its way into bookshops. In the meantime, the author had built a successful career in short fiction (to which we will return later). He was struggling to generate more and more ideas for smaller stories, however, so he decided to try his hand at an extended narrative instead. The result was *James and the Giant Peach*, the first work that really nailed the author's style as we know it today.

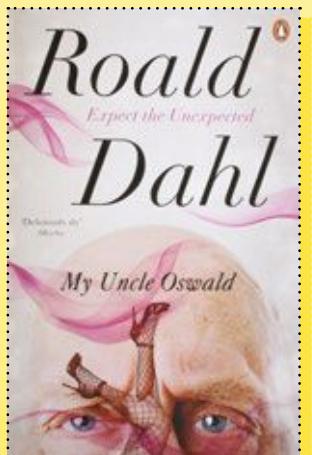
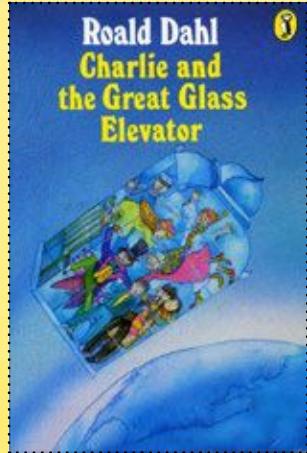
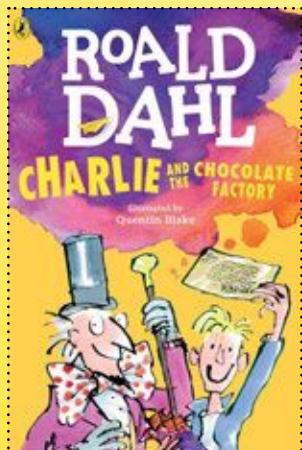
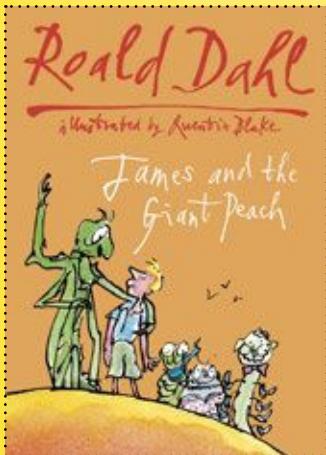
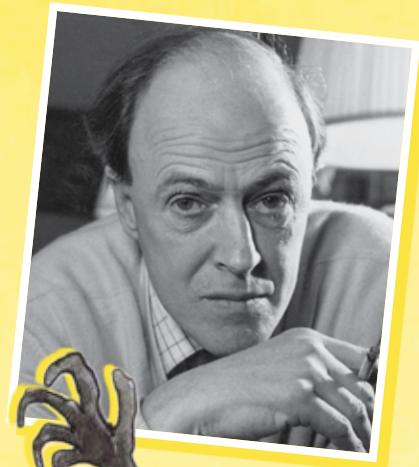
However, while his writing has remained a hit for all these decades, it didn't begin that way, as Dahl had an arduous time bringing *James* to print. For seven years, he took the book to at least eleven separate publishers in the UK, each of whom turned him down. Eventually, Dahl's daughter Tessa gave a copy to her friend, who happened to be the daughter of publisher Rayner Unwin (the same man who had recommended *The Hobbit* for publication years earlier). Thankfully, Unwin noticed how engrossed she was in the book and snapped it up. The rest is literary history.

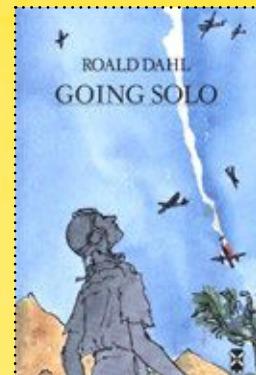
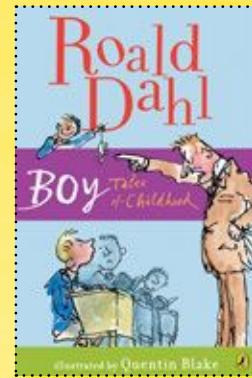
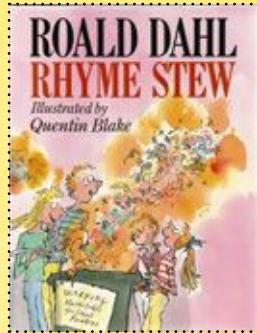
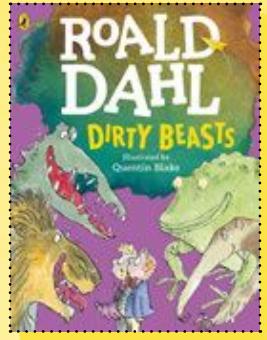
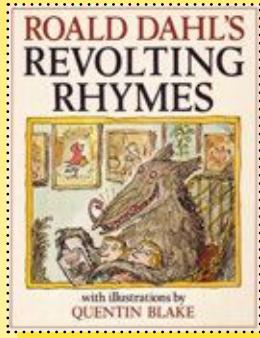
James was followed in 1964 by *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, which must surely be Dahl's defining work. It is hard to say just why this is, though perhaps it is because the story so perfectly encapsulates the author's much-imitated but never replicated style – it is full of fun and fantasy

on the surface, but thick with subversion and darkness underneath.

Still, it could have been much darker. Originally, there were 15 children who visited the Wonka factory, with one even dying after falling into a Peanut Brittle Bar machine. And you thought the other kids had it bad.

Much less famous is 1972's *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator* that, considering how popular the first book is, has oddly never been brought to the screen. It sees Charlie and Wonka use the titular Elevator to travel into space, rescue some astronauts and face off against the rotten Vermicious Knids, a predatory alien race. It is much more freeform





than its predecessor, and lacks the identifiable features of *Chocolate Factory*, but it will surely get its shot at the limelight at some point. There was going to be a third book as well, titled *Charlie in the White House* (yes, the White House), but Dahl discarded the idea after writing only a single chapter.

Later that decade, Dahl also penned *My Uncle Oswald*, which sounds like a pleasant all-ages tale but is actually a rare novel for adults from the writer. In fact, it is his second and last, following on from his 1948 tome *Sometime Never: A Fable for Supermen*, which was something of an adult variation on *The Gremlins* that dealt with the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. *Uncle Oswald* follows the titular character, apparently 'the greatest fornicator of all time', as he conspires with a femme fatale to steal the semen – yes, you read that right – of the rich and powerful. Basically, don't read this one to your kids at bedtime.

The 1980s marked Dahl's most prolific decade, as he wrote more children's novels than ever before, as well as dipping his toe into other forms. He compiled his popular collections of children's poetry *Revolting Rhymes*,

Dirty Beasts, and *Rhyme Stew*, which contained classic Dahlesque twists on familiar fairy tales and nursery rhymes. He also penned two autobiographical works: *Boy: Tales of Childhood* and *Going Solo*, which documented his experiences during the war.

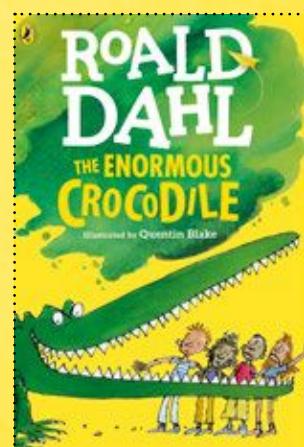
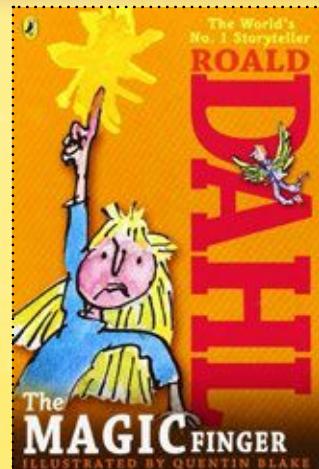
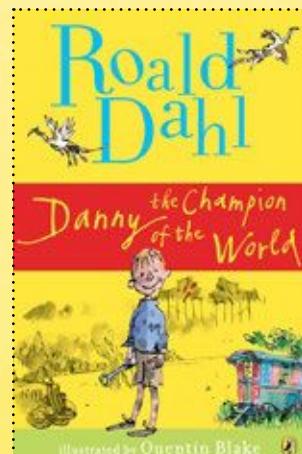
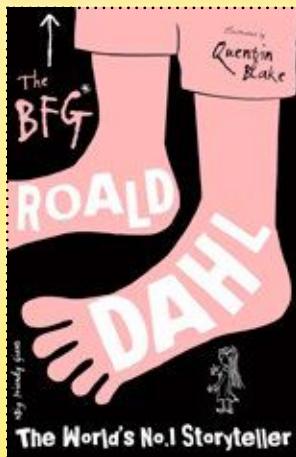
At the same time, more success followed in his most prominent field, as Dahl continued his unbroken streak of hits for children. Many of his books were drawn from stories he made up for his son and daughters or experiences from his own childhood. For example, the protagonist of *The Witches* is of Norwegian descent, much like Dahl, while *The BFG*'s Sophie is named after his granddaughter. The earlier *Danny, the Champion of the World*, meanwhile, features a boy and his father who live in a gypsy caravan. This was based upon the one he had bought for his children as a playhouse, which he later turned into his writing den.

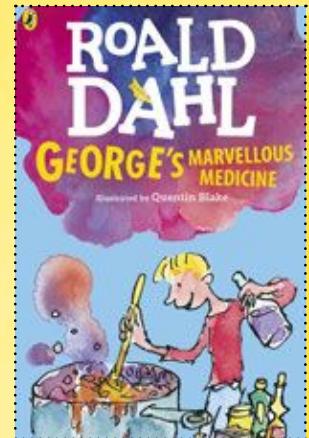
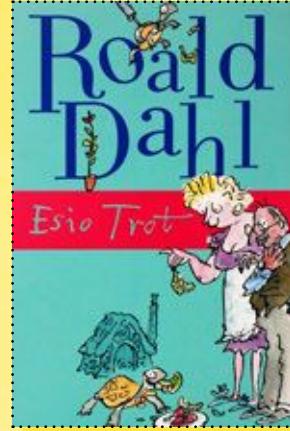
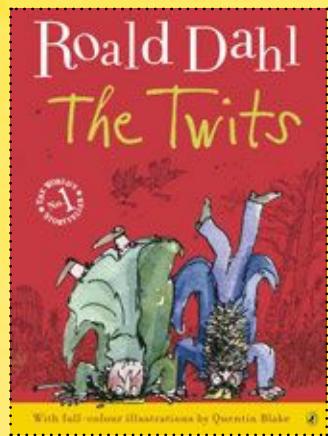
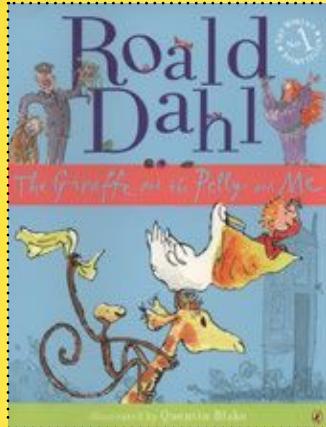
While the likes of those novels have found an even wider audience through adaptations (*Fantastic Mr Fox* has even been turned into an opera), there are several of Dahl's children's books that have not made the leap from the page –

including *The Magic Finger*, *The Enormous Crocodile*, *The Giraffe and the Pelly and Me*, *The Twits*, and *George's Marvellous Medicine*. The first three are fairly slight stories for younger children, so they might not have enough material for a film, while the latter books are arguably two of Dahl's more overtly unpleasant tales. *The Twits* focuses on the kind of cruel adults who are usually the supporting characters in his stories, and the pair certainly don't find redemption. *George*, on the other hand, is basically the story of a young boy plotting to poison his grandmother with a toxic homemade beverage.

Dahl was writing new children's books all the way up to his death in 1990, with *Esio Trot* released that very year. He also had two novels released posthumously: *The Vicar of Nibbleswicke*, which was written to benefit the Dyslexia Institute in London, and *The Minpins*. This last work was one of the very few of Dahl's books for children not illustrated by Quentin Blake. For many, Blake's unique sketchy drawing style is inextricably linked with Dahl's work and is responsible for first bringing the stories to life in the minds of readers, before Hollywood came knocking.

Speaking of which, Dahl wasn't just limited to fiction writing, as he dipped





his toe into screenplays as well. His first scriptwriting work, *The Bells of Hell Go Ding-A-Ling-A-Ling*, was for a World War One film starring Gregory Peck and a young Ian McKellen. However, the movie went unproduced as filming was abandoned after only 10 weeks, due to unaccommodating weather in the Alps.

The following year, Dahl's next script was this time successfully brought to cinemas. Some might be surprised to know that this was in fact the 1967 James Bond film *You Only Live Twice*. This initially seems considerably outside the writer's usual wheelhouse - until you consider the fact that Dahl was an 'intelligence officer' during the war, along with a certain Ian Fleming. The movie is a hugely significant one in the Bond series, as it saw Sean Connery's 007 (in his final regular appearance) face SPECTRE's Ernst Stavro Blofeld for the first time. Dahl was pleased with his work on the film, despite disliking Fleming's original novel - even commenting that it literally had 'no plot' for him to work from. He later admitted to being disappointed that he was not asked to return to the franchise.

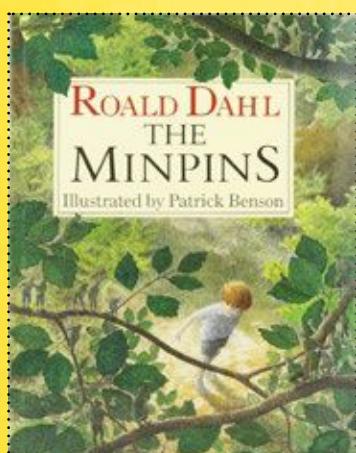
Likewise, in 1968, Dahl adapted the James Bond creator's children's book *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, co-writing the screenplay

with director Ken Hughes. If you think about it, the film is a perfect blend of the two writers' styles - with Fleming's love of gadget-laden cars and giving female characters ridiculous names (Truly Scrumptious, anyone?) paired with Dahl's typical whimsy tinged with menace (the nightmarish Child Catcher was naturally his creation).

In 1971, Dahl translated his own novel, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, for the screen. In the end, however, Dahl was not pleased with the film, as his script was rewritten by an uncredited David Seltzer. He believed that the story's focus had been wrongly pulled from Charlie and onto Gene Wilder's Willy Wonka, reflected in the title change to *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*. Dahl was not keen on Wilder's casting in the first place - his choices for the role included Spike Milligan, Peter Sellers and even the third *Doctor Who* himself Jon Pertwee (who was actually offered the role but turned it down). So unhappy was Dahl that he forbade any

other adaptation of the book, or its sequel, be made in his lifetime. As opposed to Dahl's reaction to the film, it has gone down as a classic. Gene Wilder's turn as Wonka, in particular, received universal praise.

That same year, Dahl wrote another screenplay for a very different kind of film - *The Night Diggers* (released as *The Road Builder* in the UK). A psycho-sexual horror/thriller, it starred Dahl's then-wife Patricia Neal, who had recently recovered from a debilitating stroke. Once again, Dahl had issues with the picture, practically disowning it after release. He intended it to be a

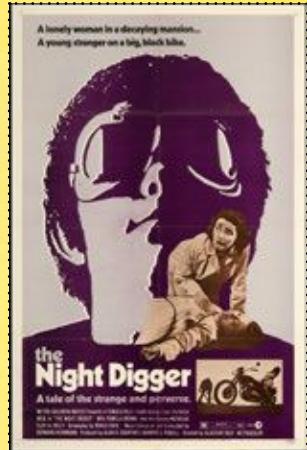




Matilda



James and the Giant Peach



The Witches



vehicle for his wife's talents over anything else, which led to some clashes with the production team.

By the 1970s, Dahl had given up on working in film and instead brought more of his adult-orientated writing to the small screen, in the form of *Tales of the Unexpected*. Still fondly remembered today, *Tales* was an anthology TV series mostly drawn from Dahl's short stories, and was typified by its twist endings. For the first three seasons, Dahl would introduce the episodes himself, explaining his inspirations behind the piece – a similar set-up to Alfred Hitchcock's role in his own anthology series *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (which Roald Dahl also wrote for). Impressively long-running, it began in 1978 and lasted all the way until 1988, though naturally there was a certain dip in quality once Dahl became distanced from the show. Back in 1961, Dahl had hosted a similarly-themed series, titled *Way Out*, in the US. That one only lasted for 14 episodes, however, before being cancelled.

Despite Dahl's dislike of working in the movie business, he does have cinema to thank for keeping his legacy alive. After his death, the steady stream of adaptations of his work certainly didn't halt – in fact,

the number increased. The 1990s and the 2000s brought many successful examples, such as the terrifying *The Witches*, Henry Selick's stop-motion animation *James and the Giant Peach*, Danny DeVito's Americanised *Matilda* and Tim Burton's re-adaptation of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. The most recent was the critically acclaimed *Fantastic Mr Fox*, featuring an all-star cast of voice talent such as George Clooney and Meryl Streep.

In recent years, it is a sad truth that the works of Roald Dahl have been knocked out of the running as the most read children's books, due to the popularity of modern franchises. However, Dahl's oeuvre is thankfully being kept alive by some of these contemporary authors. J.K. Rowling, for instance, cites Dahl as an inspiration, and certainly channels the spirit of his books when mixing magic and darkness in the *Harry Potter* series. Likewise, such gifted filmmakers as Nicolas Roeg, Wes Anderson and now Stephen Spielberg are continually lining up to make films of his books. Let's hope that *The BFG* is another flavoursome treat to be found in the chocolate factory that is the work and legacy of Roald Dahl.



Fantastic Mr Fox



Charlie and the Chocolate Factory





TO BOLDLY GO ONCE MORE...

BY CHRIS HAYDON

Star Trek is more than a TV show and film saga, it is a community. Much like its closest rivals *Star Wars* and *Doctor Who*, there is something truly distinctive about its fan culture and remarkable longevity.

There have been so many variants of *Star Trek* that it can be particularly daunting when deciding where to start first. Do you trail all the way back to the William Shatner era, opt for a Patrick Stewart-controlled narrative, or take a more postmodern plunge with the likes of Kate Mulgrew and Jeri Ryan?

In 2009, the great J. J. Abrams revitalised one of the world's most beloved franchises, offering that very same sense of awe and wonder for millennials as the original created in the 1960s.

Well, maybe it is best to start with Abrams' reboot for the purpose of this feature. His thunderously fun and thrilling

science fiction adventure rendered famous faces from the past in a new, ultra-sleek light, maintaining the tonal balance and pallets of what makes *Star Trek* so unique.

Chris Pine embodies a perfectly brash and cocksure Captain James T. Kirk, whilst Zachary Quinto's purposeful and progressive Spock is a Vulcan rendition that Leonard Nimoy was truly proud of. So much so that he featured in the movie. Fellow passengers on board the USS Enterprise with the chalk-and-cheese twosome include Zoe Saldana's Nyota Uhura, Karl Urban's Dr. Leonard 'Bones' McCoy, Simon Pegg's Montgomery 'Scotty' Scott, John Cho's Hikaru Sulu, and Anton Yelchin's Pavel Chekov.

The film was universally applauded by fans and critics alike. Abrams has the most delicate of touches when it comes to handling projects weighted by expectation. He has that rare ability to tap into what

makes something so special, and bring it to life as opposed to tainting it. He proved this biblically last year with *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*; a franchise which no doubt now has even more fans than ever before.

After such a positive reception and grossing a mighty \$385.7 million at the box-office, it was inevitable that an all-new saga was about to set sail. In 2013, director Abrams and screenwriters Roberto Orci, Alex Kurtzman, and Damon Lindelof returned to the 23rd century for the hotly anticipated sequel, *Star Trek Into Darkness*.

Although the previous film explored the relationship between Captain Kirk and Spock - as well as throwing some awesome obstacles in the way throughout - character building was not the ultimate priority here, rather narrative progression and fan service. Here the team wanted to give back to the worldwide 'Trekkie'



Can Justin Lin salvage the rebooted **STAR TREK** franchise after the contentious **INTO DARKNESS**? **STARBUST** speculates as we go BEYOND...



"We have the fact that it's the 50th anniversary next year, so that has weighed on this iteration of it. I think for sure there's a real sense of wanting to, creatively speaking with the design and with the writing, to pay homage to the '60s flavour of the series."

Chris Pine on how the franchise's big anniversary influenced the film.

network by birthing a new version of the most famous of foes: Khan.

The great Benedict Cumberbatch delivered an outstanding performance as the sworn nemesis of Starfleet, beginning his odyssey as renegade operative John Harrison before developing into that hostile baddie we always knew he would be.

Much like its predecessor, *Star Trek Into Darkness* garnered rave reviews from critics and became the highest-grossing entry in the entire franchise - raking in a cool \$467.4 million. However, it was met somewhat controversially by the dearest of fans.

A backlash erupted over that scene with Alice Eve's Lieutenant Dr. Carol Marcus (yes, you know the one), plus many felt the film was guilty of whitewashing, as Khan's true origin is of Indian descent. But with any film and television series that maintains such a loyal viewership, there will always be the few who question.

Fast forward three years and we find ourselves in present day, and the third entry in the rebooted franchise is getting ready to show its hand. Surprisingly, however, it is all change when it comes to *Star Trek Beyond*. So much so that a heavy aura of doubt lingers in the air.

Firstly, there is no Abrams in the driving seat. He was busy with *Star Wars* commitments and only serves as a producer here (like all previous entries, the film will be released under Abrams' production house Bad Robot and sister company Skydance Media). It was then confirmed that screenwriter Orci was in prime position to take control, but soon enough, he too exited and opted for a producing role.

Shortly after, Edgar Wright was the frontrunner, with Duncan Jones, Morten Tyldum, Daniel Espinosa, Rupert Wyatt, and Justin Lin upon the shortlist. Everyone was convinced that the *Hot Fuzz* and *Shaun of the Dead* director would get the gig, particularly as his creative relationship with Simon Pegg is so effective, but no, he too didn't take on the project.

After an elongated and tedious process, Lin - best known for helming the *Fast & Furious* franchise - was confirmed, much to everyone's surprise. Then there is the case of the screenplay. *Star Trek Beyond* sees the departure of Kurtzman and Lindelof, whilst Orci merely sits on the fringes, most likely in a proofreading role. Instead, the script is penned by Pegg, with support from Doug Jung, John D. Payne, and Patrick McKay.

Getting the film rolling was undoubtedly a complex task, but the



"In a way, I feel like he was more a part of this film than he was of the other two. We all held him in our hearts so much more fully. I believe that to a person, everybody showed up to work in the spirit of celebrating his life and his indelible contribution to this franchise. I do not see how it could have lasted as long without him, both as an actor and director."

Zachary Quinto on Leonard Nimoy's influence on Star Trek Beyond



wheels finally set in motion last June and the film is scheduled just in time to celebrate Star Trek's 50th anniversary.

So what do we know about the movie then? Well, perhaps the biggest insider information accessible at current revolves about the plot. *Star Trek Beyond* will primarily focus on the Five-Year Mission. Fans of the show know this as the intrepid space mission in which Captain Kirk, Spock, and the Starfleet team head out in order to explore the final frontier that is space.

Captain Kirk described the goal of the mission in the original 1966 television series through a now world-famous quote: 'To explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilisations, to boldly go where no man has gone before.'

Quinto stated during an interview that the implementation of the Five-Year Mission is inherently linked to the celebratory anniversary that the franchise and indeed its fans will be relishing in.

We also know of a major new cast member adding to the ensemble team. Following in the footsteps of Cumberbatch, Lin and his casting directors have dipped another toe into the British acting pool for their villain and have selected the ever-brilliant Idris Elba to antagonise the USS Enterprise crew. Elba has been linked to the *Star Trek* reboot for a number of years, and now he is finally getting his moment, playing a reptilian alien named Krall.

Unlike previous entries, Elba's villain is an entirely original one that Pegg moulded from the ground-up. Although he has not stated that the role was tailor-made for the *Luther* actor, it seems likely that this is the case given his attachment to casting for all three projects.

Lin's filmography is littered with high-octane, action-packed, and, ultimately, fun-filled movies. He respawned the *Fast and Furious* franchise from certain ashes, gave it a vital oil change and turned it into the roaring beast that it is today. One of the



largest complaints the Abrams-era films have suffered at the hands of 'Trekkies' is the creative remodelling of the world they're devoted to. He injected a sense of realism - and with that comes gloom - which was a big turn-off for die-hards.

It looks as though *Star Trek Beyond* will follow more in Lin's playful style and shake off some of the ruggedness to project a more optimistic outlook. Pegg himself has made it very clear that he had problems with the atmospheric shades of *Star Trek Into Darkness* and wanted to provide a lighter touch with his film, something some fans will hopefully respond kindly too. In a recent interview, Pegg stated that he wanted to embrace the spirit and style of the original television show:

"I think we just want to take it forward with the spirit of the TV show. It's a story about frontierism and adventure, optimism and fun. That's where we want to take it, you know. Where no man has gone before - where no one has gone before; sensibly corrected for a slightly, more enlightened generation..."

He also stated that the film may have some kind nods to *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock*, which serves as the next film in the previous series, although he quite rightly refrained from detailing any concrete plot connections.

Much like a large percentage of audiences, Pegg too was not a fan of Paramount Pictures' first teaser trailer for the film which arrived ahead of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. With a heavy focus on action, hyper-active special effects and a thunderous use of the Beastie Boys track *Sabotage* (which was used heavily in Abrams' 2009 entry), many felt the film looked directionless and out of place in the *Star Trek* universe. "I didn't love it," claims Pegg, "because I know there is a lot more to the film". He considered the trailer to be the marketing team saying, "Come and see this movie! It's full of action and fun!"

Other information we have access to is that composer Michael Giacchino has

"It felt quite political. There's a relatability to what's happening in our world. Not everybody's happy with what everybody calls the good guys. There's some history that we explore, to understand why he feels the frontier needs to push back. There's definitely an opposing argument to the good that the Federation think they do. There are purists that believe in independence, and believe that we're all made differently for a reason, and will fight tooth and nail to defend that. There's massive relatability to modern world politics in that sense."

Idris Elba on the motivation of his villain, Krall.



"Simon is known for being a very human and sensible artist in the characters that he creates and the characters that he creates around his character in the films. I've been a fan of his work for a very long time. And I've always believed in him. And he's British. It's like they fucking know big words and they're made to write."

Zoe Saldana on Simon Pegg penning the film's screenplay.



"Talking about the intensity of the story that Justin and Simon Pegg and Doug Jung wrote in the script. The story that they pitched was so life and death, it felt so frightening and very much like an episode of the show but writ large. It was amazing to hear."

J. J. Abrams on the tone of the film

crafted the score, having now provided his service to all three of the rebooted titles, and that the entirety of the 2009 core cast is along for the ride too. There were early musings that Quinto would depart from his role as Spock following *Star Trek Into Darkness* due to fears of becoming 'typecast', but this was simply noise as both Pine and Quinto have signed contracts to reprise their roles as Captain Kirk and Spock for a fourth picture, should one be made.

The film was shot on location in Vancouver and Squamish, British Columbia, before moving to Seoul, South Korea and Dubai, United Arab Emirates. In March 2016, it was reported that the production was to undergo 'some' reshoots, and that Shohreh Aghdashloo was added to the cast, but this has not affected the film's release date.

Star Trek Beyond opens in a crowded month. Competing alongside Steven Spielberg's *The BFG*, Disney Pixar's *Finding Dory*, Paul Feig's *Ghostbusters*, and Paul Greengrass' *Jason Bourne*, it has some mighty rivals to fend off for box-office supremacy.

But despite arriving under a heavy cloud of scepticism and doubt, few products can truly rattle the immense power of *Star Trek*'s establishment. Its fans are indebted, loyal, and ever-expanding, its social relevance remains as potent today as it did in 1966, and for it to enter our screens on the eve of its 50th birthday, it will surely be one party worth celebrating.

STAR TREK BEYOND reaches UK cinemas in IMAX 3D on Friday, July 22nd.

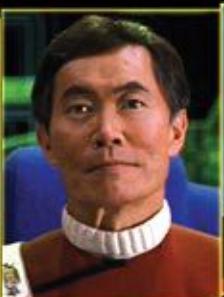


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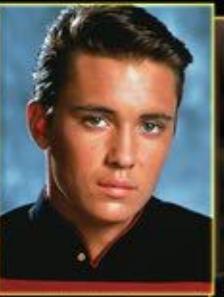
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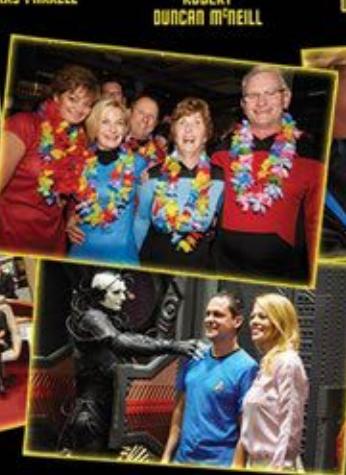
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BEYOND ROMULANS

BY ED FORTUNE

STAR TREK: BEYOND doesn't have the monopoly on strange long-limbed aliens with pointy ears doing fantastic acrobatic tricks. Science fiction is littered with beings similar to Romulans and Vulcans. These almost human-like aliens are a pretty common feature throughout the genre. Aloof, different, clever, usually with paranormal powers, and oh-so pretty, these aliens are all over our favourite works of fiction. Let's take a look at some of the best....

THE MINBARI

Babylon 5's version of Vulcans are a good example of how you can draw inspiration from similar (but different) sources and still end up in the same place.

Originally envisioned as very alien and very mysterious, the shell-headed Minbari slowly became all too familiar and all too human, much like Spock in the Original Series. Even though they spent much of the first season of *Babylon 5* flitting around being mysterious and wise, they came to be one the show's greatest draws. With their advanced technology (one that's so powerful it literally brings mankind to its knees), the Minbari were always around with a wry quip or some kick-ass martial arts stylings.



CASTITHANS

Syfy's *Defiance* is a show all about various types of alien races rubbing together and trying to get along whilst occupying what's left of the planet Earth. The

Castithans are a major faction on the show, and certainly fit the bill of the most Romulan-like race; though they tend to stray into more generic clichés. High-minded, incredibly ritualistic, spiritual, and yet also cruel and seductive, they seem to be a distillation of the more interesting aspects of both Romulans and Vulcans. Of course, this being modern TV, one of the Castithans rituals seem to involve spending a lot of time bathing and showing off their pale and exotic bodies. This hasn't hurt *Defiance*'s ratings for some reason.





ELDAR AND THE DARK ELDAR

The *Warhammer 40,000* franchise has never been exactly known for its subtlety, and the Eldar are perhaps the most 'on the nose' version of this trope. The elf-like Eldar are austere and beautiful alien beings, with science and psychic abilities far beyond the power of mankind. Like the Vulcans, the Eldar have an evil twin in the unimaginatively titled Dark Eldar; brutal, cruel and decadent creatures who delight in torture, and for some reason happen to be built like world class pole dancers. Of course, this being *Warhammer 40,000*, all the dials are turned up to eleven, so the Eldar's big dark twist is that they're responsible for one of the greatest evils in the *40K* universe.



YUUZHAN VONG

Now thankfully consigned to the 'Legends' section of *Star Wars* canon, the Yuuzhan Vong were the 'big threat' in the vast number of *Star Wars* books set after the movie *Return of the Jedi*. More Romulan than Vulcan, these cruel alien invaders were a long-lived, superior race with weird organic technology that utterly broke the feel of the *Star Wars* universe and were pretty much unbeatable, except when they were easily confounded because the plot demanded it. We can only hope they never appear in the new movies, because they were a bit rubbish.

THE ASARI

Mass Effect's answer to the idea of a mystical know-it all alien race is to give us the pastel blue coloured Asari. Long-lived, highly adaptable and filled with wisdom, these beings (despite their darker origins) are closer to Vulcans than Romulans. Though they're meant to be wise mentor types that spend their time vending wisdom and wit, most video gamers seem more interested in pursuing romantic ties with the main Asari character in the *Mass Effect* games.



TIROLIANS AND ZENTRAEDI

No list of Vulcan/Romulan clones would be complete without a mention of the still enormously popular anime series, *Robotech*. The Tirolians were a race of more-than-human beings who used their superior technology, intelligence and culture to create *Robotech*, transforming technology used in war. They also manufactured their own warrior like clone race, the Zentraedi. The Tirolians had obviously never seen or read any science fiction, because they weren't expecting to be betrayed and attacked by their warrior slaves. Both races seem to spend a lot of time gloating and going on about how superior they are, which lends further weight to our argument that they need to be on this list.



UR-OBUN AND UR-UKAR

Fading Suns is an odd tabletop roleplaying game which tries to bring together every possible pulpy sci-fi trope, mixing a theme of 'The Dark Ages in Space' with pretty much everything else. That includes a type of Vulcan, of course. The Ur-Obun fit the bill; tall, thin, slightly weird looking with a spiritual connection to ancient god-like beings, the Ur-Obun are pretty much Vulcans with the science removed and replaced with mysticism. Their big secret is that they all came from the savage, beastial and morlock-like Ur-Ukar, pale monsters who live for knife-fighting and self-scarification (Or should that be elf-mutilation).





ALL THE NEWS
FROM THE
WORLDS OF
STAR TREK
WITH IAIN
ROBERTSON

SUBSPACE RELAY

New Series Warps Ahead

Details on Bryan Fuller's upcoming *Trek* series are finally starting to trickle through. We've had a brief teaser trailer – released in May – which gives little away, other than a new *Trek* series is on the way in 2017 (and that the title of the show may simply be *Star Trek*). We've got confirmation that, in a first for a *Trek* series, the new show will be shot in Toronto, with production starting this autumn. Whilst *Trek* movies have shot outside the United States – most recently *Star Trek Beyond*, which shot primarily in Canada, along with South Korea and Dubai – this marks the first time a series has been based outside of Los Angeles. The classic series was shot at Lucille Ball's Desilu Productions, and the more recent series were all based on the Paramount lot.

As the series is still a few months away from shooting, we'll forgive them for not confirming minor details like the show's name, setting, cast or basically any concrete information whatsoever. The show's rumoured to be an anthology series, with each season taking place in a different time period, and with a new crew – something possibly confirmed by the teaser trailer, which stated 'new crews, new villains, new heroes, new worlds'. They've also suggested that the show will be set in the series' normal timeline – not that of the recent movies – that the first season at least will be set shortly after the original series movies, and that the Mirror Universe will feature heavily, which all sounds good to us.

The currently untitled series is due to débüt in early 2017, with the pilot broadcast on CBS prior to the series itself running on its streaming platform, CBS Access. The network has announced that – unlike the Netflix pattern of releasing an entire series at once – new episodes will be added to the streaming service on a weekly basis. No UK broadcaster has yet been confirmed.

Movies Arrive On Strange New Formats

Whilst the standard cut has been available before, the (in our mind) superior Director's Cut of *Wrath of Khan* is being released on Blu-ray in July. Featuring a new documentary, commentary from director Nicholas Meyer and Mike and Denise Okuda, as well as the original cut, this looks to be the best release so far of *Trek*'s finest movie.

Or, if half-assed *Khan* remakes are your thing, both *Into Darkness* and J. J. Abrams' 2009 reboot are amongst the first new titles announced for the new 4K Ultra HD format. It's described as 'the next evolution in home entertainment, 4K UHD delivers four times the resolution and more than double the number of colours available with full HD', which we're guessing will allow you to see *Into Darkness'* plot holes in all their glorious detail. Released in combo packs also containing the standard Blu-ray and DVD and crammed with extras, the two films are due to be released in the U.S. in June. No UK date has yet been confirmed, but we'd put gold-pressed latinum on them landing prior to *Star Trek Beyond*'s July release.

DESTINATION STAR TREK EUROPE Announce

Shatner Scoop

It's been confirmed that following a very successful Broadway run, William Shatner brings his one-man show entitled *Shatner's World* to the *Destination Star Trek* event being held in Birmingham in October. The legendary star will be performing the passionate show, in which topics include love, death,

motorcycles, and gorillas at the mammoth *Trek* celebration of fifty years of boldly going where no show has gone before.

It's also been announced that two spectacular parties will take place at the Hilton Birmingham Metropole hotel, not far from the event home at the NEC. On Friday, fans can don their Starfleet uniforms for the Federation Ball, while Saturday will host the Official Destination Star Trek Europe 50th Birthday Party, which promises live entertainment from *Trek* alumni Armin Shimerman, Casey Biggs, Vaughn Armstrong, Jeffrey Combs, and Max Grodenchik.

Destination Star Trek Europe takes place at The NEC, Birmingham on October 7th - 9th and tickets are on sale now from destinationstartrek.com, where you can also find out about all the other special events and fantastic guests appearing at the weekend.

AXANAR Lawsuit

A couple of nice surprises came out of May's fan event. Firstly, a street on the Paramount lot was named after the late, great Leonard Nimoy. Secondly was J. J. Abrams' announcement that Paramount would be dropping its legal case against Alec Peters, the maker of fan film *Star Trek Axanar*. The company had been suing the high-end fan film, stating that it infringed 'innumerable copyrighted elements of *Star Trek*, including its settings, characters, species and themes'. Whilst fan films for the franchise are nothing new, the scale and budget of *Axanar* had concerned the studio, which has now said it will drop the lawsuit, and produce guidelines for future fan films. However, the fight may not be quite over, as (at time of going to press) the lawsuit had not been dismissed, forcing Peters' lawyers to file their own counter-claim against Paramount.

William Schallert Passes

Original Series and *Deep Space Nine* guest star William Schallert died in May at the age of 93. Although his long career saw him appear in everything from *The Twilight Zone* to *True Blood*, as well as former president of the Screen Actors Guild, he'll be best remembered for his role in one of *Trek*'s most beloved stories. As the incompetent Nilz Baris, in *The Trouble With Tribbles*, he provided Kirk with one of his most entertaining adversaries. Schallert returned to *Trek* 25 years later, guest starring in the *Deep Space Nine* episode *Sanctuary*.

CBSaction

The home of classic American series, CBS ACTION also screens plenty of *Star Trek* every month. Here are our top episodes of *The Original Series* and *Deep Space Nine*, showing this month...

JUNE 22ND - DAX (DS9: S1 Ep.8)

Curzon is accused of a murder from 30 years ago, but Jadzia has an alibi to save him.

+++

JUNE 30TH - AND THE CHILDREN SHALL LEAD (TOS: S3 Ep.4)

The Enterprise takes on some orphaned children, with some rather unusual gifts...

You can find CBS ACTION on Sky 148, Virgin 192, Freeview 64, and Freesat 137.

INTERVIEW

VAUGHN ARMSTRONG & CASEY BIGGS



STARBURST shoots the breeze with two popular actors from the *STAR TREK* Universe, and almost has to break up a fight...

STARBURST: What were your hopes as younger actors before being cast in the *Star Trek* franchise?

Vaughn Armstrong: I wanted to be a great Shakespearian actor when I was young. One of the greatest roles I ever did was when I was 17, and was exactly the right age to play, was Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet*. But things changed after that, you want to do everything and then, when I got married and started having children, I wanted to do things that paid me well. At first I was really wanting to be an artist for art's sake, but as responsibility began creeping up on me, money became a better reason for working.

Casey Biggs: I sing and I used to be in to big musicals when I was at school. There were people around me who saw what I could do and thought, 'there must be some talent there' and if you want, you either go to New York and try your luck there or you can go to one of these schools and get training. So I ended up coming to Juilliard School in New York when I was 18. And that's a classical training there, so like Vaughn said, I longed to be a classical American actor and I was never interested in television

or movies, because it was all about being on stage. But what I find interesting, is when you're an actor on stage, you are the one who is in control. You have very little to no control on film or television about how you are perceived, it's much more satisfying to work on stage. I always had a director's eye as well, I remember saying to one of my teachers at Juilliard that I wanted to be a director, and they said you're going to make plenty of money as an actor, so don't worry about it. So, if I had started directing when I was younger, I probably would have had a huge career as a director. But I've had a great time as an actor. If I could do Chekov and Shakespeare for the rest of my life, I would be satisfied with my career.

What are your proudest moments from your careers?

VA: First off, just having one is something I'm very proud of, because it's not something that's easy to do. But there were plays that I was very fortunate to do whilst I was in a theatre academy. I was hired as a resident artist to play Macbeth, Stanley in *A Street Car Named Desire*, Beau in *Bus Stop*, the Stage Manager in *Our Town* and several

other things. And that was one of the proudest moments in my career. I was very young and just back from Vietnam and they chose their season around me. I was only 25. And that really boosted my opinion of my work. It showed me that 'I could'.

CB: The stuff I'm proudest of is all my stage work. I originated the role of Elmer Gantry in a musical called *Gantry, A Long Day's Journey Into Night*, my favourite stuff is always when you can hold a stage in-front of a thousand people just in the palm of your hand. It's just the most thrilling thing and to give them an experience that is life-altering. That's another thing I believe, you can't alter somebody's life in a film.

VA: I'm not sure that's true!

CB: I'm talking! And I think you can alter people's lives in a theatrical situation, because a film will play whether you're sitting there or not.

VA: I'll tell you, *On the Waterfront* helped a lot of people understand how they had to bind together. Films have won the Cold War even, they can change people's lives and do. I sit watching a film, say like *Room* – a fantastic movie and I cried all through that film.

CB: Did it change your life?

VA: In a way. It reminded me about an element of life, about how a parent needs to be the absolute protector of their child.

CB: I just think it's a passive engagement rather than the theatre, which is an active engagement.

VA: You and I differ here and I like the theatre a lot. But once you grab that person's heart in a film, it can do the same thing. And a lot of people have never a play before in their whole lives.

CB: Would you agree or disagree that it's a passive engagement?

VA: I get very involved in a film. I'm not sure I agree. I think that a film or a play can grab you in the same way.

So... calming it down a little, what's the one question you want to be asked?

VA: Can I give you some more money?

CB: How much will you take to do this? No, if you allow yourself to go deeper than the superficial that this whole franchise is all about. It's about how to live your life. Every once in a while at conventions like this, I will go off on this vent about making everybody try to realise that they're as important as we are.

VA: I was about to say, 'how can I be a more tolerant person?'

CB: Listen to me! That's how!

ANDREW KEATES

VAUGHN ARMSTRONG and CASEY BIGGS will be appearing at DESTINATION STAR TREK EUROPE, the official convention celebrating fifty years of the series. Find out more by setting coms to destinationstartrek.com.

GOTHAM'S ONCOMING STORM

by Fred McNamara

JUNE 2016 IS THE THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FINALE OF THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS COMIC SERIES. SO TO COMMEMORATE, WE TAKE A LOOK BACK AT THE LANDMARK BATMAN STORY...



History can be an odd thing. It preserves and celebrates the most treasured events in popular culture - good and bad - illuminating their long-lasting substance for the entire world to see. It's often the case where that celebration is so gargantuan that the event in popular culture becomes smothered by its own reputation, and loses the impact that history so mouth-wateringly jumped at in the first place.

Such is the case for Frank Miller's seminal Batman comic book, *The Dark Knight Returns*, the much-celebrated tale of a retired Bruce Wayne emerging from the shadows in order to once again defend the streets of Gotham, which has morphed into a grotesque dystopia in his absence. His return to prominence, however, is divisive for the city he protects, with its citizens torn as to what the Batman stands for. Combined with a handful of Batman's enemies stepping out of their own shadows, the threat of a murderous gang called the Mutants terrorising Gotham, and Superman being on hand to intervene should Batman's return escalate an already volatile Gotham even further, it's worth applauding Miller's all-encompassing tale when it takes up only four issues.

On the surface, this weary, unforgettable take on Gotham's Caped Crusader is forever in danger of collapsing under the weight of everything you know about it. It's the reason why we picture Batman as a cinematic entity, rather

than a character restricted to the pages of a comic. It can always be found on your average 'Top 10 Batman Comics' lists, or even 'Top 10 Graphic Novels', heightening your expectations of the story if you haven't read it. It's also arguably responsible for Zack Snyder's polarising cinematic experience (and boy, it sure is an experience!) *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*.

But does it remain a potently fragmented tale of ageing ideologies like it did all those years ago? So much of *The Dark Knight Returns* has been accepted into Batman's identity as a figure of popular culture that it's easy to take this book for granted. However, that question perhaps answers itself. When reading the book, it's immediately easy to see why so many writers, artists and filmmakers cherry pick from this exhaustive tale in crafting their own vision of Batman. Little of this comic's fire has been extinguished since its début, and it all boils down to Miller's overwhelmingly apocalyptic manner of storytelling.

The first thing one notices about *The Dark Knight Returns* is the artwork. There's a messy urgency in Miller's dystopian Gotham. His version of a ruptured city, driven to visual insanity, is horrifically intoxicating, and vividly recalls the earlier landscapes from *Ronin*. And yet for someone who may be new to comics, Batman, or Frank Miller in general, it has the power to be entirely off-putting. So much of Gotham

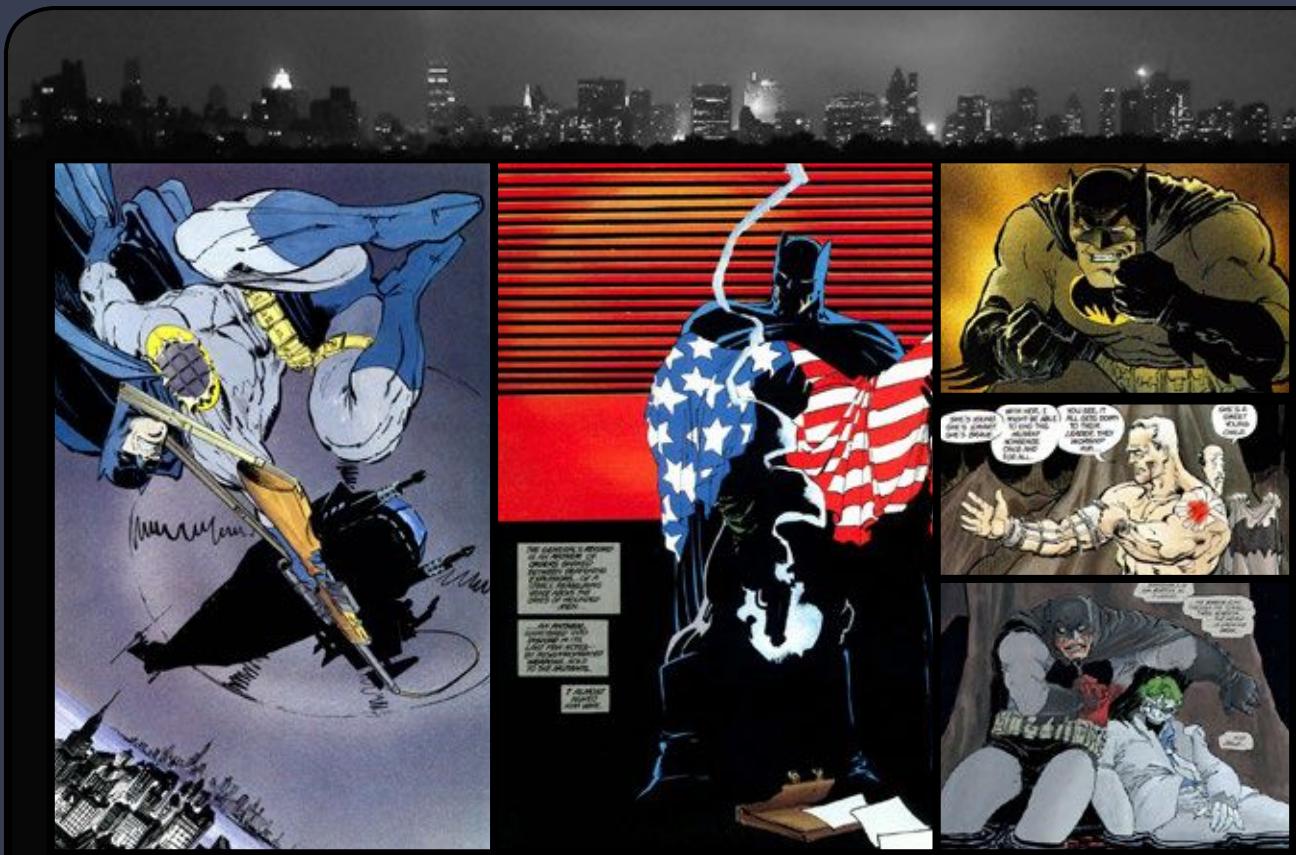
appears scribbled, unfinished and lacking in sensibly thought-out structure. So much of that spills over into the rest of what Miller draws. Characters appear as caricatures, removing any sense of humanity from proceedings.

That initial feeling of incompleteness is highlighted by the demanding paneling. We swerve from cramped, awkwardly layered squares to panel-less, page-sized wonders, full of some of the most striking images of Batman ever committed to comic form.

There you have a key factor in *The Dark Knight Returns*' appeal in a nutshell - it's such a demanding read. You feel both victorious and a sense of adoration for the comic just for reaching the final page in one piece. Across its four chapters, *The Dark Knight Returns* deals with its plot in the same way it deals with its artwork - more swerving.

The story itself is no straightforward affair, as Bruce Wayne dons his cowl once again to deal with multiple, intertwined threats, all against a backdrop of public outcry as a variety of Gotham's elite shoot Batman down with every chance they get.

But here, you almost have something of a relief, a tonic, in *The Dark Knight Returns*. The story itself unfolds gradually, building on Batman's battles with Two-Face, then the Mutants, then the Joker, before culminating in a vicious confrontation with Superman. Through that unusually gentle pacing, a sadistic, carnivorous Batman emerges. His



final fight with the Mutant leader in Book Two, *The Dark Knight Triumphant*, says it all – “Something tells me to stop with the leg. I don’t listen”. Putting his criminals back into the Arkham hole they crawled out of isn’t enough for this Bruce Wayne. He doesn’t just defeat his enemies. He taunts them, humiliates them, tortures them, and pulls them apart thread by thread.

It almost doesn’t matter what your moral stance is on Batman, whether he should or shouldn’t kill. The numerous scenes in *The Dark Knight Returns* where he ruthlessly deals with his enemies in the most brutal way imaginable are stirring scenes. The final showdown between Batman and the Joker in *The Dark Knight Falls* is a wonderfully gruesome affair, one that highlights the Joker’s twisted mentality and still manages to show the internal drama Bruce always seems to face. The seeds for Miller’s future backlash for his portrayal of a Batman who feeds on violence are sown in *The Dark Knight Returns*. Once again, this comic’s reputation is why it lives on, regardless of its own merit.

So many jaw-dropping moments like these, however, are pinned down by an expertly-paced story that rattles along at breakneck speed, and isn’t really bothered if you’re keeping up or strapped in tight. You’re hanging on to the edges of this story or you’re not – simple as that.

Each issue is a world-builder in itself, with Batman engaging in all-out war with one

enemy per issue, the whole thing loosely connected with themes of how age and accountability for superheroes have long-lasting effects. Wait, did Frank Miller invent *Watchmen* seven months before Alan Moore did?! The plot does thicken with each issue, and it’s all tied together through Batman’s constant self-referential criticism. It wears thin after a while, but it adds to the themes and internal drama of *The Dark Knight Returns*.

Whatever the overall story of *The Dark Knight Returns* may strive to be, there’s a fascination in its own jumbled nature. So much is spread out across the four chapters that it’s hard not to get engrossed in it all. Batman is constantly fighting a seemingly endless parade of psychopaths and murderers against a politically tense backdrop featuring Gotham’s citizens angered by his vigilante actions. It’s all set up to be a Batman story for the real world, but it’s all given a grinding sense of subversion when mixed with Miller’s devilishly broken artwork. There’s a hallucinogenic throttle to *The Dark Knight Returns* when characters, plot, artwork and pacing are thrown together with such spry aplomb as this.

It’s hard not to look at *Batman: Year One*, Miller’s other Batman classic, released a year later, as almost something of anaesthetic to *The Dark Knight Returns*. An equally brooding take on Bats, *Year One* somehow feels less menacing by comparison. With far neater, structured artwork, a more cohesive plot and a

Batman who’s fairly solid in the head, the carnivalesque atmosphere that gives *The Dark Knight Returns* so much of its flavour is pretty much non-existent.

A vital factor in *The Dark Knight Returns’* continued legacy is the multiple meanings readers can take away from it. It’s a riveting portrait of an older Batman, at first forced to confront, but eventually consume, his demons. It’s a long drawn-out exercise in sadistic vigilantism. A pretentious, overblown affair stuffed with cold religious imagery. It’s rushed, incomprehensible, and full of too much action and not enough plot. It’s a celebration of the darker side of Batman we all know and love.

Ultimately, is it good, or is it bad? Well, that’s down to you and personal taste. But the one thing *The Dark Knight Returns* isn’t is a waste of your time. It personifies the Batman character as we know him today. We can cringe good-naturedly at the Adam West/Burt Ward incarnation, maybe even find something to appreciate about 1997’s *Batman and Robin*, but such is the power of *The Dark Knight Returns* that we know we can leave these versions behind, knowing that far better, and darker, adaptations await us, the bulk of which owe to *The Dark Knight Returns’* ever-burning reputation.

Perhaps, when the dust settles, it is a bit of everything mentioned. But *The Dark Knight Returns* is not a comic to be liked, it’s a comic to be remembered.



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ELECTILE DYSFUNCTION

AS **THE PURGE: ELECTION YEAR** LOOKS TO CONTINUE THE HIGH-CONCEPT HORROR/ACTION SERIES, STARBURST TAKES LIFE IN HAND AND HEADS OUT INTO THE FRAY TO SEE WHAT WE CAN EXPECT...

by Jack Bottomley

The Purge is an incredibly unusual franchise. Blessed with a great core concept that pretty much gives infinite scope for chaotic action, gnarly violence and insane characters, the potential has always been there for any films within this series. Yet, in many senses, the trilogy has really started back to front. Director James DeMonaco with 2013's *The Purge* started small, before opening up into the larger scale anarchy that you would have assumed the franchise would display from the start. So, as we delve further into that bedlam - with added dashes of contemporary dirty politics - we look at the background of this unexpected

series, the story so far, where Election Year picks up and what we can expect from another cinematic night of survival.

The Purge, at the very beginning, was inspired by James DeMonaco's wife commenting on his road rage and from there, this story of endurance, decaying humanity and moral/ethical dilemmas grew, culminating in the first film. The film, set in 2022, proclaimed a financial collapse in the 2010s (well, Donald Trump is about to run for President) and tells of how 'The New Founding Fathers' set up a totalitarian government and, using the 28th amendment, created '*The Purge*'. It is all a bit wordy but to clarify things, *The Purge* is

an annual event where, for 12 hours (7pm – 7am) all crime is legal and all emergency services are suspended. The only rules (which, if broken, are punishable by public hanging) are that Level 10+ government officials are to be left alone (damn) and all weapons graded class 4 (bazookas and such) are forbidden. Aside from that, everything is gravy.

This background is all practically explained away in the opening blurb to the first film and it is quite the idea, which leaves plenty of room for devious innovation. Apparently 'purging' has led to a 1% crime rate and an affluent economy (who knew?) but the binary





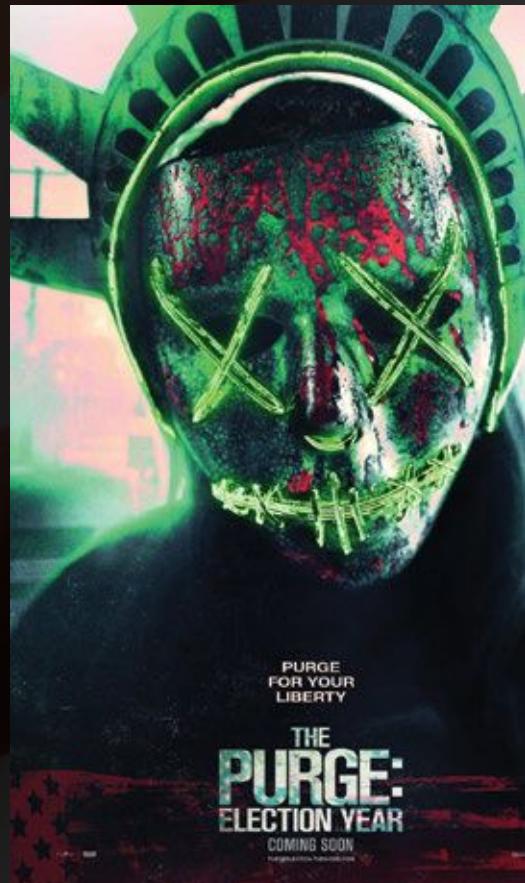
opposition of violence and peace has always been a tasty core for many works of fiction and reality, and proves to be once again here. However, this all being said and going back to our opening statement, this series really did start a tad topsy-turvy. In the first film the story basically veered away from the night's devastation, with the widespread events of the purge acting as a backdrop for what was a simple home invasion thriller. *The Purge* starred Ethan Hawke as James Sandin, a salesman in purge home security gear, returning to his wealthy home in LA to prepare for another quiet purge night with his family (Lena Headey, Adelaide Kane, and Max Burkholder). However, all is thrown into disarray when a stranger (Edwin Hodge) comes knocking, desperate for help and refuge. Nervously, the family let him in, only for this man's masked tormentors to come calling and demanding him back... or else?

The film did pick up on some moral dimensions, as the characters discussed the complexities behind the need to purge and DeMonaco's screenplay raised the odd issue too, using the masked assailants as a metaphor for the almost glorificatory holiday approach people had to this night of violence - some see the purge as a time to celebrate and in the process devolve as human beings. Alas, the film was praised for its potential but criticised for failing to explore its ideas deeply, instead choosing to tell a clichéd home invasion story. Still, for the mixed critical reviews (and, more damningly, disappointing audience), the film still became an unexpectedly large hit, making nearly \$90 million on a \$3 million budget. Clearly, another night of purge-ery was required and DeMonaco was only too happy to return to the politicised disorder of the near future.

In between films, many people had come not to expect too much from a sequel to *The Purge*, due to its lack of living up to the premise. But, in a rare case nowadays, DeMonaco seemed to learn some vital lessons and listened to people, thus 2014's *The Purge: Anarchy* was a much improved sequel that took the action to the streets. It featured a realistic plot that saw married couple Shane and Liz (Zach Gilford and Kiele Sanchez) run out of fuel and fail to get to safety before the start of *The Purge* and mother Eva (Carmen Ejogo) and daughter Cali (Zoë Soul) caught up in a violent conflict at their home. Both parties eventually came under the protection of a toolled up off-duty cop (Frank Grillo), who was out to avenge the death of his son, and together they tried to survive the event.

The geared-up street gangs and violent mayhem offered in DeMonaco's enjoyable sequel was an uncommon case of part two outdoing part one. The film still pushed the boundaries

of believability and occasionally veered more into B-movie fun than the intelligent thrills it aimed for but there were some keen moments of meaning (particularly a sub-plot where the upper classes hosted purge parties and gambled on lives) and a badass but humane lead in Frank Grillo's character,



simply known as Sergeant, who showed uncharacteristic (for this series) mercy in the closing moments, by sparing the drunk driver who killed his son. There was certainly room for improvement but this entertaining follow-up perked up hopes for the series' future and with better (if still slightly mixed) reviews and a \$100 million profit on its budget (said to be somewhere around \$11 million), we were bound to be going back out into the night for another round of purging.

So we arrive at 2016 and are about to enter the third film in the franchise, *The Purge: Election Year*, and call us hopeful but from the sounds of things, director James DeMonaco could finally have been able to create a film that properly capitalises on his concept, as this time the politics that surround the purge are coming to the forefront and mixing with the survivalist action. In a rather contemporaneous stroke (as the moral fibre of politicians is under more scrutiny now than ever), this third film explores themes of civil rebellion (hinted at in *Anarchy* with the Anti-Purge Resistance Fighters, led by Edwin Hodge's aforementioned 'Stranger') and political betrayal.

Originally supposed to be about the very first purge, elements of that initial narrative are still intertwined in the plot of *Election Year*. Set two years after *Anarchy*, *Election Year* sees Leo Barnes (the official name for Frank Grillo's returning character) become the head of security for Senator Charlene Roan (Elizabeth Mitchell), who lost her family 15 years ago on purge night, and is the

frontrunner in the upcoming election, with her vow to abolish the Purge. However, her governmental associates are less than pleased with this and come the next (and possibly last) purge, The New Founding Fathers see to it that Senator Roan and Barnes are forced out into the open on purge night. The trailers have showcased a great deal of horror in this instalment, alongside the dark sadistic action, meaning this could be the most twisted entry in the series to date.

Not only focusing on violence as a benefit for government but also expanding the aforementioned rebellion angle - with Edwin Hodge's character (the only actor to appear in all three films) and his purge resistance team coming to the aid of our leads - could this be, finally, the film that grasps the possibilities of this series with both bruised, bloodied and injured hands? Add to this some typically unhinged masked assailants (a token of this series by now), some unusual haunting imagery, a cult religious aspect (are these purge cults the illusive 'New Founding Fathers') and a creepy part-rendition of the American national anthem (Nathan Whitehead is back once again to score the film) and the footage so far suggests there is the possibility here for one hell of a ride. Jacques Jouffret's (who has handled cinematography for all three films) dark alleyways and streets of madness maintain that gritty, violent and futuristic post-apocalypse vibe that made *Anarchy* more exciting but the political tangent to the film certainly means this could end up being more than a B-movie-style fierce

romp and even if it doesn't, more of the same as last time is better than reverting back to the lacking elements of part one.

Grillo looks to be in ass-kicking form as Barnes (that *Captain America: Civil War* Crossbones gear would feel right at home here), with the possibility that we could see more of his backstory, which was cut from the last film. Also joining Grillo, Elizabeth Mitchell's (TV's *Lost*, 2009's *V*) promising character and series regular Edwin Hodge, are the likes of Mykelti Williamson (*Forrest Gump*, *Con Air*), Kyle Secor (TV's *Homicide: Life on the Street*), Betty Gabriel (from the upcoming *Beyond Skyline*) and Joseph Julian Soria (*Hamlet 2*) in undisclosed roles... after all, there has to be some secrets left to tell!

The Purge: Election Year once more sees writer/director James DeMonaco take us to the dark recesses of humanity, as people become monsters to cleanse their souls. No doubt this franchise, backed by Blumhouse and Platinum Bay, has had its wins and losses in translating its auspicious idea onscreen. However, as the last film showed us, this is no ordinary franchise. *The Purge* twangs man's Neanderthal nerve for primitive violence and asks us what we would do and how we would survive. As *Election Year* looks to develop this series of films, which will soon go from 'near-future set' to 'present day', we do wonder how long it could be until this shit actually happens... needless to say we're partnering up with Frank Grillo when that day comes... or Chuck Norris.

THE PURGE: ELECTION YEAR attacks UK Cinemas for more than twelve hours on July 15th.



HORROR
Obscura

This month, the jilted John Townsend examines a recent claustrophobic horror film you may have overlooked...

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Consider this for a moment: what do you expect from a horror film? Obviously, you would hope that in the first instance the film will scare you, that it will make you jump or cleverly pluck the nerve of that inner fear you try so hard to keep hidden, both consciously and subconsciously. It remains then a question of how the film achieves one of those things. Perhaps it will be through scary monsters or creatures both real and fantastical that will creep, crawl, or flash across the screen at the periphery of your vision. Maybe the film will wearily rely on the irritating modern trend of quiet... quiet... BANG, a style of filmmaking designed solely to make the audience jump high and often without the need for any identifiable narrative.

Whatever it is that scares you, most people will agree on two things that always, always will: the dark and those damn scary children. And it just so happens that *Confined*, showing on Horror Channel in June, has both in abundance.

It is very likely that *Confined* is a film that has passed you by. Known at various times as *Confinement* and *The Abandoned*, the film now carries the title *Confined* and it is a film worth making an appointment for.

Confined follows Streak (Louisa Krause, *Martha Marcy May Marlene*), a troubled woman on her first day at a new job. Plagued by unknown issues, she has taken a seemingly thankless position as a night security guard at a once impressive, now abandoned apartment complex, in the hope that she can begin to get her life back on track. As she struggles to bond with her new partner, the impatient and intolerant Cooper (Jason Patric, *The Lost Boys*), Streak begins to suspect that there may be more to the dark depths of the building than she has been led to believe. Ignoring Cooper's warnings, she investigates and stumbles upon a nightmarish history.

The trick that writer and director Eytan Rockaway pulls off is that you think you know where the *Confined* is heading from very early on in proceedings. A great deal of the premise and set up is taken directly from the horror film handbook, with everything from troubled young woman to creepy building ticked off as if a 'how to' list is being carefully followed. However, as the film develops - especially in the second act - Rockaway messes with your pre-conceived



ideas and expectations; the pace slows down and the director demonstrates great skill and willpower in allowing the scenes to progress organically. Never does anything feel forced, as the suspense builds almost imperceptibly to a point of becoming almost unbearable. You're acutely aware something is about to happen, but the film never allows you a moment's respite as Streak stubbornly presses on into increasingly foreboding darkness.

It would have been too easy, and a great disappointment, for Rockaway to have resorted to simplistic jump scares at this time, but he resists, and in doing so allows *Confined* to generate its own atmosphere. At any moment you expect the darkness to take shape into some monster or other, to morph into a malevolent form or being from some long-forgotten nightmare, but that never happens. Instead, *Confined* retains some vague footing in realism, bringing a sense of possibility to what could so easily be just another fantastical situation.

Part of the success in convincing the viewer to believe in Streak's story comes from the performance from Krause, along with Patric's able support. The friction in their relationship never once feels forced or insincere as they spar and bicker while constantly trying to find out more about the shade and mystery in each other's backgrounds. That there are many secrets is obvious, but the extent of the deception never becomes frustrating, serving only to draw one further and further into the unfolding drama. There is clearly much more going on than you are being made aware of, and several key moments hint at the bigger picture at work, but so subtle and naturalistic are the performances that this never becomes your focal point. The events on screen demand your full attention and this feat of distraction feeds your interest in the film.

At a time when the horror genre is becoming diluted with routine, cliché-ridden fare that barely generates a whimper of fear from an audience, it is refreshing (and reassuring) to discover a film that, while not perfect, does achieve what it sets out to do through simple, effective means. The narrative may limp along a little at times, but as stated earlier, this does aid the growing tension, and there is a tried and tested formula being implemented throughout. The ending itself will also prove divisive as many





will find it wholly unsatisfying and too bluntly determined in its references – something we will not discuss in further detail here so as to avoid spoilers. And these flaws can often become too much of a pre-occupation in a film, but not here. If the ending doesn't quite work, then so what? When you ride a ghost train or a rollercoaster, it isn't the shaking return to the station you remember as the queasy effects begin to dissipate, is it? It's the ride itself, the nerve-shattering journey through moments of fear-fuelled adrenaline when you think, just for that split second, in perhaps the briefest moment of sheer terror, that things might just *not* be okay. That's what you remember and tell your friends about.

We won't claim that *Confined* is perfect; far from it. If this was a standard review within these hallowed pages, this would be a 7 out of 10 film. A good rating, certainly, and a recommendation, but the key thing here is not what is missing from *Confined*, but what the film achieves with style and skilful contrivance. This is a film that, if you go with the story and allow yourself some release, if you leave your inhibitions and genre pre-conceptions at the station and simply let yourself be taken for a ride, will scare you by relying on a simple and basic fear we all share, even if we pretend we do not.

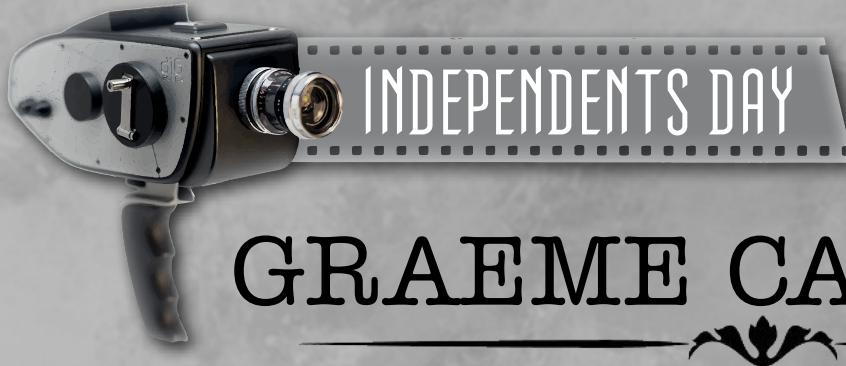
For many, Horror Channel means classic films and renowned chillers, but further investigation reveals a host of often unheralded and unheard of genre films that deserve just a little fanfare of their own. Previously, superb horrors from recent years such as *The Seasoning House* and *Banshee Chapter* have been thrust upon unsuspecting audiences and through enthusiastic word of mouth are gaining a cult reputation, something we absolutely encourage. *Confined* may not quite carry that promise but it is without doubt a worthy addition to your viewing schedule, one you will surely enjoy.

And just make sure you watch it in the dark. What's that you say? Afraid of the dark?

Well then, *Confined* is definitely the film for you.

You can watch *CONFINED* when it screens on Horror Channel on June 24th. Sky 319, Virgin 149, Freeview 70, Freesat 138.





by Martin Unsworth

GRAEME CAMPBELL

This month, INDEPENDENTS DAY profiles a filmmaker whose ambitious first feature, LEGEND OF BLACK DIAMOND, is a politically charged, futuristic steampunk western...



STARBURST: What was it that got you into filmmaking?

Graeme Campbell: Curiously, writing scripts for a comic. My friends and I saw the original Star Wars when it first came out and it just blew us away. Making films at that time wasn't an option but writing comic strips and publishing our own comic was. That's how it started in terms of me devising stories and turning them into comic strips. I didn't realise it at the time, but this was my apprenticeship into screenwriting.

The next pivotal moment was meeting a filmmaker who was churning out horror movies on Super 8mm film. It never occurred to me that you could make exciting sci-fi fantasy movies on a micro budget and then I thought 'I could do that!' And I did.

The comic very quickly paved the way to a film unit called Artemis Films, where in my teens and twenties (along with the guys from the comic), I got the chance to make a string of horror, science fiction and fantasy films. We had some festival success and TV exposure and this was really my 'Film School' into what was to happen later.

What would you credit as your biggest influences when writing *Legend of Black Diamond*?

A big influence was Sergio Leone and the spaghetti westerns he made with Clint Eastwood. I knew from the start that I wouldn't be writing a traditional western but I wanted to absorb the atmosphere and playfulness of those movies. I also listened to a lot of Ennio Morricone and the ideas started flowing.

Another influence was locations. I spent time seeking out and wandering around unusual locations, which in turn began to influence my ideas. There's a disused quarry we utilised, full of sand and rubble with rusting buildings and an atmospheric metal tower blowing in the wind. That was a big influence, as was a deserted concrete silo and mine workings. Decay, post-industrial civilisation and retro technology all began to enter the mix. Ideas were becoming much, much darker and then the banking meltdown was dominating the news and that's where the concept of my evil force, my main villains came from.

How did you raise the budget?

Nobody believes me when I tell them the film had no substantial budget, but let me explain. The actual spend was £1000 but the *real* spend had everything been paid for commercially would have been around £250,000. I was able to make it because I run a commercial video company called Glass Bullet Productions alongside my co-producer and editor Laura Binnie. The company has its own equipment and studio space. We work with a lot of crew and actors who, like ourselves, have ambitions within genre feature films, so rather than take a holiday or do something more sensible, we made a futuristic western about the international banking crisis during our holidays and weekends for two years. We recently picked up a 'Best Feature' and 'Best Production' at the Best and Silver Dollar International Film Festivals and were quite amazed at the spend behind some of the competition we were being nominated against, compared to our meagre budget!

What equipment did you use?

Mainly, the cameras we were using at that time for our commercial video work, like the Canon H1, A1, and the 5D. They were small and had to be robust as they took a lot of punishment in the way of dust, sand, damp and sub-zero temperatures.

Portable lighting played a big part, in particular battery powered LED lighting rigs that enabled us to film in normally dark and inaccessible locations - caves for example.

Post-production was also key and editor Laura Binnie spent many months on

special effects and perfecting the sound design and music. Foley added greatly to the atmosphere of the movie, with Laura recording many unusual tracks to bring Black Diamond's 'Kingdom' to life.

How did you manage to secure the locations?

Through very simple producer techniques like meeting the owners, telling them about the film and in some cases letting them read the script and view my previous work. Most were very passionate about their locations and valued the publicity of seeing them on screen. The railway preservation society that allowed us to use their train, track, and buildings has featured in a number of press and magazine articles as a result of the movie and a screen locations agency also assisted in securing one important location as the owner wanted to promote it for further film work.

Were there any obstacles or problems during the production?

Challenge number one was to make an ambitious, even 'epic' movie for the price of a postage stamp. For that I had to get as much 'money' as possible onto the screen without actually spending any and that required every producer trick in the book. To achieve that, we acquired some great-looking locations, an operational train with assorted carriages, miles of track and the film's great location ace card - a concrete silo the size of an enormous amphitheatre that we dressed as the Citadel (the lair of the Bankers).

We now had all the infrastructure in place, but challenge number two was to

make a believable action movie and that's where, by a chance of fate, we found a veteran Hollywood stunt man called Bob McCrystal. He contacted me after reading about the movie in the press and offered his services as a stunt coordinator and stunt man. That's why the movie has stunts and also why Bob's character, the Masked Liquidator is involved in so many shootouts. For *STARBURST* readers, Bob has an amazing heritage that includes *James Bond*, *Superman*, *Star Wars*, and *Doctor Who*.

There's a steampunk influence, is this something that interests you in general?

Movies like *Mad Max* had been a big influence on me but the classic steampunk elements really came from my co-producer Laura and an amazing maker of steampunk props called Jeff Fallow. Jeff is a published graphic novelist and lives a steampunk existence, wearing incredible costumes and making Victorian computers, camcorders and all sorts of incredible gadgets. He phoned me up and asked to be involved in the movie. He made guns, a robotic arm for the Provost Marshall and a clockwork spider that kills! He also took a part as the Dollmaker.

My co-producer Laura spotted the steampunk elements very early on in the script and encouraged me to expand these elements. The evil banking elite are involved in the creation of automatons, some complete and invincible, but others half-completed and insane. Costumes, too, developed steampunk themes, particularly that of Sparky, the train-driving, motorcycle-riding, leather clad ally to Black Diamond.

LEGEND OF BLACK DIAMOND



There is a very political undercurrent to the script - was this an attempt to draw parallel to the banking crisis and bureaucracy that surrounds the financial sector in general?

Broadly, yes. The capitalist system has many advantages but when it goes wrong it can be brutal to both the individual and the society affected. I witnessed many evictions during the property collapse when decent people had an army of bailiffs and police descend on them. I saw an increase in begging and even more shop and factory closures. The explanations seemed surreal for why all this was happening and even stranger, the fact that almost overnight governments transferred billions into the coffers of corrupt banks to save them. 'Who was controlling who' began to fascinate me, as did how easily ordinary people could be destroyed by the casual and callous transfer of capital. I'm not a documentary filmmaker, so that particular route was not open to me but I am a big fan of the late Gene Roddenberry's belief that the science fiction genre can be a great and subversive vehicle for exploring controversial and 'dangerous' ideas. That's why I went down the route of making a genre-based fantasy and like *Star Trek*, it operates on two levels; on one hand being a simple adventure tale and on the other, exploring contemporary political and social issues.

The film has a very strong cast, how did you recruit your actors?

The actors are key to this movie and I have nothing but praise for the commitment

and performances put in by our cast. The majority were actors whom I had previously directed, mainly in commercial videos. I knew their strengths and played to these when I wrote the script. We didn't audition as I wrote parts especially for the cast. Jemma Grace Carroll, who played Black Diamond, is an incredible actress who brought real depth to the part in terms of steely determination and humanity. She was my 'man with no name'. The other female lead Sparky, played so feistily by Laura Binnie (yes, she acts too) has an element of *The Avengers* Emma Peel about her and action lies at the heart of this character.

The other very notable character is the Queen of the Liquidators, played so wickedly and insanely by Christopher Cubitt. I had never worked with Chris before but I was introduced to him after seeing him in a Bertolt Brecht play and thought 'wow!' And 'wow' was the appropriate word, as even on set, cast and crew were stunned by his performance. Chris took the part providing that he was allowed to take his character to the edge of insanity and that's what happened as he morphed into a deranged, omnipotent, strutting and preening automaton who acts as a champion for the banking elite in the Citadel.

Have we seen the end of Black Diamond, or is there a chance of her return?

The Talker at the end of the movie mentions the Curse of Black Diamond. This is the sequel and we have a plot for it, part backstory and part 'what happens next?' Whether it will happen depends very much on the success of *Legend*. We

had very modest ambitions for *Legend*, very aware that other producers working within our genre could probably outshine us in almost every department due to their larger budgets. But that hasn't happened and the feedback from the movie's limited cinema release and festival screenings have been very positive. We were delighted to get nominations at a number of film festivals but stunned to pick up two awards. The movie will be released on DVD later in 2016 and if that goes well, a sequel will be more likely.

What's next for you?

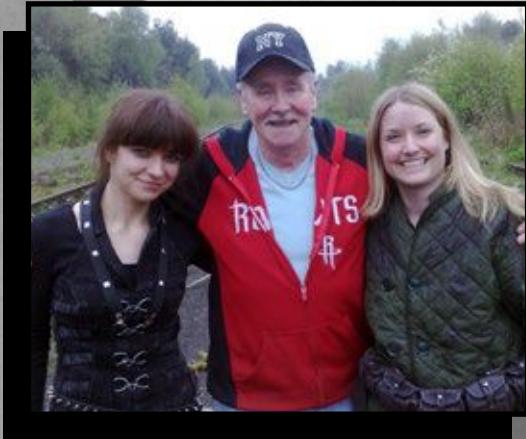
We're wrapping up shooting on a movie called *The Prey - Specimen Red*. It's a time travel-themed mystery set across five different time zones including the distant future, the 1980s, World War Two, Victorian times and pre-history. It's a bit of an old Amicus 'devil controlling your destiny' plot, as a group of travellers are rescued from a war zone, find sanctuary in an underground nuclear command bunker and disappear one by one!

Beyond this, we are working on a third genre-based fantasy feature film to complete the trilogy of *Legend* and *The Prey*. This is set in post-apocalyptic London during a nuclear winter when undertakers have become the dominant military force, upholding the law and religion of a controlling elite and promising immortality.



For more information on *LEGEND OF BLACK DIAMOND* including release dates visit www.legendofblackdiamond.co.uk





LEGEND OF BLACK DIAMOND

CERT: TBC / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: GRAEME CAMPBELL / STARRING: JEMMA GRACE CARROLL, GABZ BARKER, LAURA BINNIE, GRAEME CAMPBELL / RELEASE DATE: TBC

Set in a futuristic world but with an age-old and still incredibly apt story, *Legend of Black Diamond* is a swift and fun tale of the struggle against the tyranny of those who run the financial systems.

Working in her father's coal mine, Black Diamond (Carroll) has struggled for years to keep the industry going, treating the workers well and being highly respected. Unfortunately, the bankers who had loaned her father money come calling with a demand for repayment. The banking system has itself gotten into trouble, and with the mine now being lucrative, they no longer just want repayment, but the profits they have made too. When Black Diamond staunchly refuses, the bankers hatch a plan to take the mine by force.

The bankers strike first and with power, killing several miners - one of them Black Diamond's closest friend - so she teams up with Sparky (Binnie) to bring down the organisation. This won't be easy, particularly as they are captured and held at the Citadel, their fate seemingly sealed.

Clearly shot on a low budget, *Legend of Black Diamond* is an ambitious venture, but one which works thanks to its snappy running time (it's a little over an hour) and the use of some fantastic locations and an enthusiastic cast. The storyline is kept speeding along with the use of a narrator (Barker), and although it's an occasionally clunky way of progressing the tale, here it works as it's done so evocatively.

The real power of the film is the clear parallel between Black Diamond's plight and what's happening in the world right now (and, indeed, has done since the banking system was formed). The corruption and greed of the large organisation, and their determination to crush others is a sad situation that we seem all too familiar.

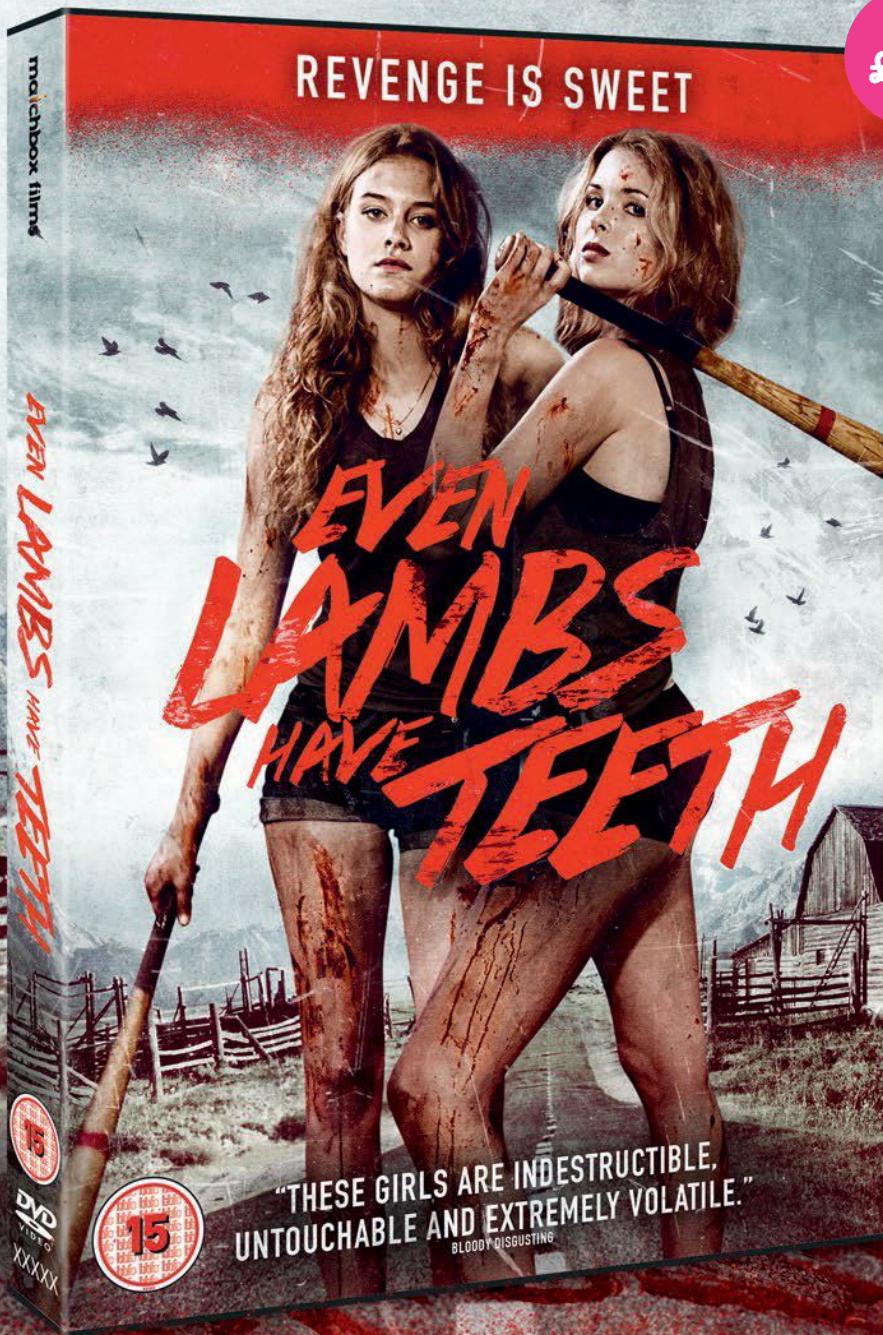
Although the visuals are best described as futuristic steampunk western, there's a lot of World War II imagery, which grounds the film and keeps it - despite some of the more fantastical elements - very relatable. If one overlooks the usual traps that low budget independent films fall in - some of the acting, some of the effects - *Legend of Black Diamond* is an enjoyable adventure. Things are set up so we could even see more adventures of the intrepid miner, and since the character of Black Diamond herself is powerful enough to carry it, that might not be a bad thing.

Director and screenwriter Graeme Campbell clearly has an eye for setting up a scene and filming action, and will no doubt improve as he continues. As for his début, this is certainly worth your time.



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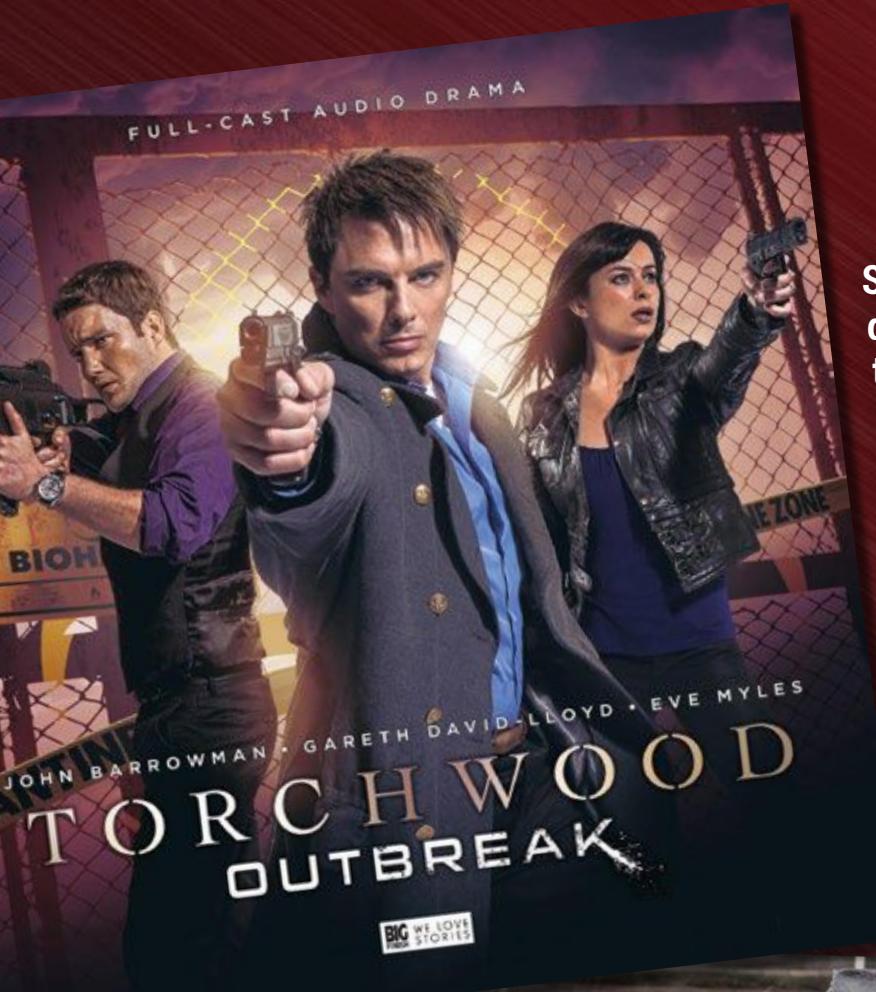
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TORCHWOOD

TALES...

by Tony Jones



STARBURST caught up with director Scott Handcock to discuss the Big Finish **TORCHWOOD** range, and the recent news of the full-cast **TORCHWOOD: OUTBREAK...**

STARBURST: We gather it's been a bit of a whirlwind recently and that you've just spent seven days in various studios?

Scott Handcock: Not sure I can say exactly what we've been recording, but yes, it was seven days straight, split between Cardiff and London, hopping around three different studios and five different stories. Keeping that many plotlines in my head was a bit of a mammoth task, especially when you're leaping around to make the schedules work. Halfway through the dialogue edits of the mammoth *Torchwood: Outbreak*, however, and it's sounding brilliant... fans are in for a real treat for the tenth anniversary!

How did you get involved in the range?

Quite simply, I was asked if I'd like to direct the opening story, and it kind of went from there. I'm based in





Cardiff, so I was a natural fit in that sense too, especially as Gareth and Eve are still based there. In terms of the stories we're telling, however, *Torchwood*'s very much its own thing. Every release has been wildly different - that's part of the fun of it - and being contemporary, we've tried to always ground it in reality, no matter how dark, or emotional, or laugh-out-loud the stories might be. The process is the same as any other series - the scripts and characters are what keep it feeling fresh.

How has it been working with producer James Goss?

James Goss is a brilliant producer, and yes, it takes an enormous weight off me on *Torchwood*. On all my other ranges, I've often ended up spinning plates, and whilst a lot of the producer's role involves setting up the studio dates and sorting contracts beforehand, studio days can be tough if you're the only one there to welcome actors and keep the day moving. On something like the previous week - where we worked right through from Monday to Sunday - having a producer, particularly one like James, to support you in the studio every day makes a world of difference! *Torchwood*'s been a massive project. It still is... getting these people into studio in the first place is a huge logistical challenge! That full-cast box set has been over a year in the planning stage - and I think a lot of people overlook the

producer's role in that sense. It's not as easy as just phoning people up and them all being free at the same time in the same place... but if we've done our job, you'll never need to think about that!

Were you a big fan of the show?

I loved it, yeah. I actually moved to Cardiff in

November 2006 to start work at BBC Wales, helping out as a runner on *Doctor Who Confidential* and *Torchwood Declassified*. So I have very fond memories of it from the sense of having seen the first few episodes in October, then being catapulted into the big, mad world of BBC Wales Drama and seeing everything in the flesh. That was my first job out of university, in fact, so to find myself directing the latest iteration of *Torchwood* almost a decade later is really quite peculiar!

The audios so far have hopped around the whole *Torchwood* timeline, does that make it harder to get the feel right if any one series from Big Finish has limited continuity episode to episode?

Honestly? No, not really. I've worked on enough series and one-offs at this point - some sci-fi, some horror, some straight drama - you just take each script as it comes. If you think *Torchwood* can be defined as a single type of story, I think you're missing the fun of it. This is a series that brought us *Cyberwoman* one year, *A Day in the Death* the next, then the superlative *Children of Earth* another year later. All wildly different, all brilliant in their own ways. So no, hopping around the timeline isn't an issue as a director. If anything, it keeps things exciting!

So far the *Torchwood* range has given us small-cast pieces, mostly focusing on a single returning character (with some exceptions); How have you found that, and how have the cast dealt with returning to the roles they once had several years ago?

I love the smaller, more intimate style of storytelling that audio drama allows you. Audio's a far more intimate medium anyway. It's not like everyone crowds around the radio any more. People tend to listen alone - on a run, in bed, at the gym - wearing headphones, so the smaller scale stories allow you to really focus on what makes the characters tick, and give these big, bonkers sci-fi concepts an emotional resonance more easily. Plus, it has the advantage that we can showcase and celebrate the individual characters in their own right. Who'd have thought, back in 2006, that we'd be getting a story with

Suzie Costello on her own adventure? Or Toshiko Sato in the wintry wastelands of Russia? Not to mention Sgt Andy and the duplicitous Norton Folgate... It's been great to welcome all the cast members back to the world of *Torchwood*, and offer them scripts that really give them something to sink their teeth into.

If we turn to *Torchwood: Outbreak*, one of your most recent recordings, how was a full cast story in comparison to the releases so far? How do you balance so many large personalities in studio?

Logistically, *Outbreak* has been one of the most ambitious projects I've ever been involved with, simply in terms of getting everyone into the studio. Each day's schedule had to be ultra-flexible. People we thought were available one day ended up being available on another, and one member of the guest cast unexpectedly needed to be recorded weeks ahead of everyone else! In terms of the personalities in studio, it was a riot in the very best of senses. They're all enormous fun, and a little bit cheeky, but also ultra-professional... I've always maintained you get the best results when people are relaxed, and there's never any danger of tension in a *Torchwood* studio. Everyone's simply enjoying themselves too much! Worth saying, it's not the sort of thing I think we could do justice in a single hour. People have been asking about full-cast releases for ages, but when you look at *Torchwood* episodes on screen, very often episodes would focus on a single character, with the rest of the team popping up for odd lines here and there, or lurking in the background. On audio, that wouldn't be satisfying, you want everyone to have their role in the story, and *Outbreak* hopefully achieves that!

You also write, do you have any plans to write for the *Torchwood* range?

I'd love to write for *Torchwood*, but I'd have to have the right idea first. Being in the director's chair, and seeing all the scripts that come through, I know just how high the bar's been set already... but yes, of course, I'd like to.

And, finally, if you were on a night out with both Dorian Gray [who you also produce, direct and write for] and Jack, how do you think they would get on, and which one would out-party the other? Would you survive to tell the tale?

As John reminded me last week, Jack doesn't get drunk, so he'd probably hold out longer. But Dorian naturally parties a great deal harder. Either way, I wouldn't survive an hour, let's be honest. I'm an utter lightweight. I'd be the one trying to bundle Dorian into a taxi at two in the morning! As for how he'd get along with Captain Jack... I think they'd absolutely hate each other. People who have that much in common usually do... +

Check out bigfinish.com for more information and to buy the latest audio drama releases. *TORCHWOOD: OUTBREAK* will be available in November 2016.

REVIEWS

THE LATEST BIG SCREEN GENRE RELEASES REVIEWED AND RATED



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: OUT OF THE SHADOWS

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: DAVE GREEN / SCREENPLAY: JOSH APPELBAUM, ANDRÉ NEMEC / STARRING: MEGAN FOX, WILL ARNETT, STEPHEN AMELL, PETE PLOSZEK, ALAN RITCHSON, NOEL FISHER, JEREMY HOWARD, GARY ANTHONY WILLIAMS, SHEAMUS, TONY SHALHOUB / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Out of the Shadows doesn't just follow up the last film but in many ways reboots that reboot, taking heavy inspiration from the much-loved 1987 animated series.

The plot sees the four turtle brothers - Michelangelo (Fisher), Leonardo (Ploszek), Raphael (Ritchson) and Donatello (Howard) - still hiding in the shadows, while Vern Fenwick (Arnett) takes the heroic praise for defeating the Shredder in the climax of the last film. Meanwhile, April O'Neil (Fox) is pursuing a lead on how scientific mind Baxter Stockman (Tyler Perry) could be in league with the metal claw-swinging supervillain. But things truly kick off when, in a routine prison transfer, Shredder (Brian Tee) is broken loose and comes across otherworldly forces that have given his Foot Clan the key to possibly taking over the Earth. So it is up to the Turtles and O'Neil, alongside temperamental corrections officer Casey Jones (Amell), to save the city of New York and more than that, the entire world.

The last Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles did not exactly fill one with hope regarding the franchise's future. Featuring great action sequences and some good versions of the characters alongside a so-so plot, questionable designs, underused cast members, misfiring humour and yet another pervy moment of Megan Fox-gazing, it was not abysmal, just not all that good. So after that and the hardly flashy trailers, expectations were not so high for

this sequel. However, it seems as though some lessons have been learnt and Earth To Echo director Dave Green is more on target, because Out of the Shadows is a huge improvement over its predecessor.

Josh Appelbaum and André Nemec have made this sequel as much a second start as a follow up and this time have dispatched with a lot of the self-congratulatory 'this is so funny' humour to actually allow the characters some colour and charisma. True, everything is not finely tuned, with some similarly misfiring jokes still remaining, but more often than not the script actually moves along nicely with some good gags and a very admirable attempt at capitalising on modern day Donald Trump-fragmented politics, albeit incredibly briefly. In many ways, this is the most accomplished Turtles since the the first '90s adaptation but it is set back from soaring slightly by some lingering issues.

Michelangelo is nowhere near as irritating as last time and each of the Turtles get a chance to develop an actual personality this time round, as the film takes inspiration from both the comic book source and the aforementioned animated series; in fact, leaning more towards the latter (see the closing credits theme). This is nowhere more evident than in how the characters are presented. Shredder - while not used as much as he could be - is much better designed in this film and allows Brian Tee's stone-faced performance to contrast

with the inspired silly energy. Fox's April and Will Arnett are given less substantial roles overall this time, though both have their moments and at least Fox's obligatory sexualised moment serves a purpose in moving along the plot, as opposed to the impromptu perv-like arse-staring last time, and, in fact, every time she's been in a Bay production. Out of all the performances, the hooded star of TV's Arrow is among the most charming; Amell is a nice new addition as Casey Jones, striking a chemistry with all his co-stars and bringing to life a character that fans will be pleased to see, though it would have been nice to see more masked action from him. Other characters make effective débuts, such as matey mutated villains Rocksteady (WWE star Sheamus) and Bebop (Williams), alongside a certain brainy foe that we won't spoil. Although one gripe is Tyler Perry's over-excitable turn as Baxter Stockman, which is thankfully not prolonged but very annoying.

All in all, Out of the Shadows is a lot of fun; it could go further with certain elements and ideas but it far surpasses the last film and boasts some enjoyable action that will delight many fans of the hit animated incarnation of these characters from back in the late '80s. The effects and designs are slicker and this fast-paced and ridiculous sequel drops the self-satisfied attitude a bit and livens up in the process. Like a Big Mac and a drink, this could have been even better had it had just that little bit extra with it, but what the heck, it's still tasty. Avid fans may want to add another number to our score because this is a film that for better (colour and charm) and for worse (a narrative structure of one of the animated episodes) is like the TV series. Pencil this down as a turtle surprise! Sorry...

JACK BOTTOMLEY

EXPECTED  6

ACTUAL  7





ALICE: THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

CERT: PG / DIRECTOR: JAMES BOBIN / SCREENPLAY: LINDA WOOLVERTON / STARRING: MIA WASIKOWSKA, JOHNNY DEPP, HELENA BONHAM CARTER, ANNE HATHAWAY / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

It's back into Lewis Carroll's LSD trip of a world for the sequel to *Alice in Wonderland*, this time directed by James Bobin, with Tim Burton producing.

Alice (Mia Wasikowska) is now a confident young ship captain, exploring the globe and believing nothing is impossible after the events of the first film. Upon returning home from a

voyage, she discovers she is to be made a clerk by her new boss and former admirer Hamish (Leo Bill), and her mother (Lindsay Duncan) will lose her home if she refuses.

Visited by Absolom (Alan Rickman in his last role), who is now a butterfly, Alice goes through a mirror back into Underland (née Wonderland)

where she is greeted by her old friends, including The White Queen (Anne Hathaway), Tweedledum and Tweedledee (Matt Lucas), Thackery (Paul Whitehouse), Cheshire Cat (Stephen Fry), Bayard (Timothy Spall), McTwisp (Michael Sheen), and Mallymkun (Barbara Windsor).

Notably absent is the Mad Hatter (Johnny Depp), who is mortally depressed following a chance encounter with a hat reminding him of his family's death (including father Rhys Ifans) years ago. The only way to save him is for Alice to go back in time and stop this from happening. To do this, she needs to steal the chronosphere, a device that controls time, from Time himself (played wonderfully by Sacha Baron Cohen). However, the inept Time wants the device back, as does the banished Red Queen (Helena Bonham Carter). And of course, time travel never has any complications...

The film is an improvement on Burton's disappointing *Alice*

in Wonderland. Bobin's world is slightly more toned down, matching the more sombre themes of time, death and regret (Carroll wrote the story after the death of his father). Depp has ditched the Hatter's Scottish accent, with Baron Cohen filling the void with a Herzog-esque German accent for Time. The film seems more tolerable and watchable as a whole, although there is still a candy floss explosion of colour and plenty of zaniness.

There is overacting galore, usually on purpose and left up to Bonham Carter and Hathaway, fulfilling a subplot that explains how the sisters became enemies. The story itself is not very strong but the film is more coherent than its predecessor with more depth. It's an enjoyable return to Wonderland, but still missing the wonder.

JONATHAN ANDERSON

EXPECTED ++++++ 5

ACTUAL ++++++ 6



X-MEN: APOCALYPSE

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: BRYAN SINGER / SCREENPLAY: SIMON KINBERG / STARRING: JAMES MCAVOY, MICHAEL FASSBENDER, OSCAR ISAAC, JENNIFER LAWRENCE, NICHOLAS HOULT / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Continuing with the younger elements of the X-world, the threat of the day is that of Apocalypse (Isaac), an ancient being who is the first ever mutant and who seeks to erase the world in order to start from scratch. To tackle this behemoth, it's down to Charles Xavier (McAvoy) to bring together a crew of established names as well as some who are new to Xavier's School for the Gifted. In amongst the returning faces are the likes of Mystique (Lawrence), Beast (Hoult) and Havoc (Lucas Till), whilst the newbies (at least in this timeframe) are youngsters such as Jean Grey (Turner),

Scott Summers (Tye Sheridan) and Nightcrawler (Kodi Smit-McPhee). As Charles has his allies, so does Apocalypse with Magneto (Fassbender), Angel (Ben Hardy), Storm (Alexandra Shipp) and Psylocke (Olivia Munn) as his Four Horseman to assist him in decimating the world as we know it.

In terms of scope and scale, *X-Men: Apocalypse* can be heralded as a triumph, delivering gigantic set piece after set piece, all of which look phenomenal in their exquisite grandeur. Bar one wonky mental battle between Charles and Apocalypse late on, they all work wonderfully in what

they do. Similarly, each and every character who appears on the screen, be they a hero or a villain, looks stunning and as if they have been plucked straight from the page of a comic book.

Quicksilver steals the show when allowed to. If you were wowed by his moment to shine in *DoFP*, then be prepared to have that topped here, for his reintroduction to the main X-Men team is a sequence that is up there with the very best cinematic set pieces in recent memory.

Alongside Quicksilver being one of the film's shining lights, so too is Fassbender's Magneto. When we first pick things up, we find Magneto living a new life with a wife and family. Seeing his descent into becoming one of Apocalypse's henchman is the strongest arc of the movie, and it's likewise the most heartbreakingly. Other highlights include newcomers Angel and Nightcrawler, but Scott Summers, aka Cyclops-in-waiting, is the absolute pick of the bunch where the youngsters are concerned, even though delivering a teen X-Men team and a teen Cyclops could've played ridiculously on the big screen.

X-Men: Apocalypse is certainly one that is a little tricky to fully evaluate. The film has some hefty flaws and problems

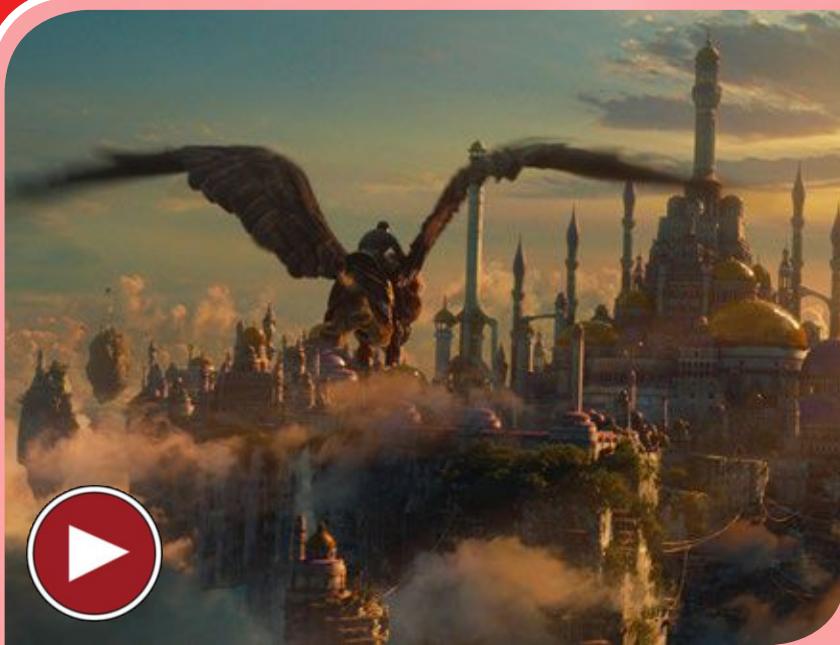
that simply cannot be ignored, particularly when it comes to timeframes and blatant plot holes, yet the comic book fan in us hugely enjoyed it for a whole variety of reasons. At times, comic book films need to be larger than life, they need to tackle huge event arcs, and that is where this effort succeeds. Apocalypse himself may be a mixed bag during the second act lag that the film stutters through, but his star shines brightly during the final act and serves as a worthy opponent for our heroes to come together to tackle, which in turn helps the X-Men feel very much like their comic book counterparts.

Apocalypse certainly has its issues, but it is undeniably a fun and engaging comic book movie that is second only to *X-Men: First Class* in how well it brings the comic book X-Men world to the big screen. There may be liberties taken at times and there may be some things that will irk both fans of the cinematic franchise and of the comic books, but *X-Men: Apocalypse* is the very definition, for better or worse, of what an X-Men comic book movie should be.

ANDREW POLLARD

EXPECTED ++++++ 6

ACTUAL ++++++ 7



WARCRAFT: THE BEGINNING

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: DUNCAN JONES / SCREENPLAY: CHARLES LEAVITT, DUNCAN JONES / STARRING: TRAVIS FIMMEL, BEN FOSTER, PAULA PATTON, DOMINIC COOPER, TOBY KEBBELL, DANIEL WU / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

In cinema, there are many unshakable rules and laws; everyone respects Citizen Kane, we all agree on how cool Samuel L. Jackson is, you never dispute Alfred Hitchcock as the master of suspense, and you do not expect much from any video game movie. Over the years, many video game phenomenons have pressed X to jump to the silver screen but pretty much all of them have been cases of 'Game Over'. So much so that, among cinemagoers, the video game movie curse is well known. Well, after years of forging a cast and crew, finally Blizzard Entertainment's computer game sensation Warcraft is marching into battle on the big screen. So, with a fantastic director behind it, can Warcraft: The Beginning break the curse? Other critics have suggested no, but we suggest it has done just that.

The story goes that the orc homeworld is on the brink of dying, but in the face of this, wielder of the sinister death-powered Fel magic Gul'dan (Daniel Wu) has opened a portal leading to the peaceful world of Azeroth. As this horde of orcs aims to conquer the world, it falls on the king's loyal knight Anduin Lothar (Travis Fimmel) and his forces to lead the battle to save their land. However, not all the orcs are convinced that this action is the best for their race, as Durotan (Toby Kebbell) - chieftain of the Frostwolf Clan - fears for his family and his race as war looms between man and orc. Meanwhile, mixed breed survivor Garona Halforcen (Paula Patton), also forced to question whose side she is on.

The main issue with Warcraft is also one that many will be most happy with, in that it is very unforgiving on newbies in terms of the jargon-filled dialogue. Such is often the case with a lot of fantasy works, but the kingdoms, clans, councils and

magic terms are slung about as often as 'boomsticks' are fired here. The plot, much to its credit, at its root is relatively simple and thus the head-scratching (to average viewers) Easter eggs and links to the games do not overrun the main narrative and there is still much (for the uninitiated) to enjoy here. Commonly with video game adaptations, the films miss the point of the source material or fail to strike the right tone, which is certainly no issue here. For the first time in memory, a video game film genuinely looks like the game it is adapting; even for the newcomers - as is this writer - the stark, grand and impressive video game feel is unshakable.

True, the film does have some simplistic moments - akin to cut scenes or an end boss - but the desire to please fans of Blizzard's zeitgeisty game has not extinguished Duncan Jones' own creative fires. Loyal it may be, but Warcraft, from the pulse-racing opening to the genuinely welcome surprises in the climactic battles, still manages to boast a heart beneath its muscle and armour. The visuals are stunning (with Simon Duggan's cinematography and the digital backdrops and sets being a triumph) and the story, even in its wordy and nerdy moments, is fast-paced and packed with action, but it is the poignant plot points and deviations from certain clichés in Jones and Charles Leavitt's world-building screenplay that genuinely surprise you. Most, quite reasonably, expected an epic lacking character or soul in place of scale, but Warcraft is genuinely a lot better than it has any right to be, considering how others of its ilk have struggled.

Jones directs with a clear aim to please the fans; critics have clunked his film over

the head with a hammer but we found lots to love in this visually arresting fantasy. Vibes of John Carter and ideas that are well worn in this genre of filmmaking crop up but despite some overblown elements (a magical clash between sorcerers later on), many more enjoyable ones fill this well put-together fable. Perhaps destined to encourage a cult following, if not break box office records (we shall see), this film truly offers a beginning to what will hopefully be a series, but also manages to stand on its own as a fully formed film - with a start, middle and end - while leaving room for more. It could do with a director's cut version perhaps, to flesh out certain elements, scenes and characters but what is here offers some big, impressive goings-on, that bring the characters to life.

Deep and complex characters were never really an expectation but the script does actually allow for healthy doses of humour and gravitas, making the majority of the characters here very likeable and effective. Protagonist Durotan is a brilliant creation, with the motion capture letting Kebbell emote and allowing the big, brutish orc to have a heart (the moments with his wife Draka (Anna Galvin) and son Go'el are brilliant). Meanwhile, Fimmel is magnificent as the film's Aragon-like hero Anduin Lothar and he strikes a good chemistry with Paula Patton's new character, Garona Halforcen, a rare instance of a strong female lead in a classically structured fantasy. Plus her mixed racial background allows for an area of intrigue regarding her place in the narrative. Meanwhile, villainous duties are well handled by the nasty and devious Gul'dan - played by Daniel Wu and very well at that. Dominic Cooper as King Llane Wrynn also offers great support, as does Ben Schnetzer as young sorcerer Khadgar, who proves a vital aspect to the film alongside Ben Foster's mysterious Guardian Medivh.

The film surprises in many ways but it all comes down to big warriors atop fantastical beasts, lobbing big arse weapons at each other's toothy, green-skinned and dreadlock-headed mugs... so what's not to like. Duncan Jones' clear passion project (certainly tested by personal tragedies during the course of the film's making) succeeds where so many others have failed and when Ramin Djawadi's great score kicks in; you can feel the goosebumpy affection for the material coming through the screen. Warcraft: The Beginning is an axe-swinging, tusk-snapping, sword-clanging, good old-fashioned fantasy that wastes no time getting going and, despite the fact it would benefit from some wrinkles being ironed out, it stands as the best transition from video game to film yet. We loved it, many others will too and fans will feel right at home, naysayers be damned.

JACK BOTTOMLEY

EXPECTED  5

ACTUAL  8



GREEN ROOM

CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: JEREMY SAULNIER / STARRING: ANTON YELCHIN, PATRICK STEWART, IMOGEN POOTS, ALIA SHAWKAT, JOE COLE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

On the road and desperate for work, an indie punk metal band take a gig at a shady bar in backwoods America. Sounds rough? Even worse, it's a bar run and populated entirely by violent neo-Nazis. Even worse than that – the band are unlucky enough to witness a murder in the bar's green room, leaving them trapped and at the mercy of a pub full of furious Nazis determined to shut the poor kids up for good. Worst of all, they're

pitted against Patrick Stewart, in a mode of evil we haven't seen since his Mel Gibson conspiracy theorist torturing days.

Locking themselves backstage with only a burly, terrifying bouncer and the murder victim's friend for company, the besieged bandmates face the fight of their lives. Of the kids, it's Anton Yelchin, Imogen Poots and Alia Shawkat (*Arrested Development!*) you're most

likely to recognise, so young and wide-eyed that you'll immediately sympathise with their plight. Stewart (skin) heads off the villains, clearly relishing a role which lets him unleash all of his Shakespearian malice and threat. Quiet yet commanding, it's a performance to savour, reminding us how scary the man can be when not admonishing mutants or being the best thing on Seth MacFarlane projects.

Even if he weren't in it, though, *Green Room* would be a treat. It's a brutal, masterfully tense thriller, its shocking bouts of bloody violence offset against its nerve-jangling stand-offs and cataclysmic aftermaths. Few punches are pulled in depicting the film's various brutalities, made all the more upsetting for our burgeoning fondness towards the characters and the growing certainty that it can't end well for any of them. Thankfully, it's funny too; it's by no means a comedy horror, but (much like writer/director Jeremy Saulnier's previous work, *Blue Ruin* and *Murder Party*) it utilises a slick, sick

gallows humour, that prevents it from getting too bogged down in misery.

Its setting will win *Green Room* many fans, too; the sweaty punk rocker energy palpable and reminiscent of *From Dusk Till Dawn*'s Titty Twister. Add to that the action of *Dog Soldiers*, the (American) skinhead bovver boots of *This is England* and the backwoods rural Nazis of (an American) *Frontiers*. None of this is massively original – its story and character beats remaining fairly predictable to the end – but the writing, performances and sheer bravado of it all more than makes up for its moments of cliché.

Like being trapped in a mosh pit full of demented punk rockers, *Green Room* will kick your ass, leaving you beaten, changed and a little bit traumatised. You'll have had a hell of a time, though.

JOEL HARLEY

EXPECTED +++++++ 8

ACTUAL +++++++ 9



THE CONJURING 2

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: JAMES WAN / SCREENPLAY: CAREY HAYES, CHAD HAYES, JAMES WAN, DAVID JOHNSON / STARRING: VERA FARMIGA, PATRICK WILSON, FRANKA POTENTE, MARIA DOYLE KENNEDY / RELEASE DATE: JUNE 17TH

Never play with Ouija boards. Unfortunately, the kids in the 1977-set *The Conjuring 2* will have been too young to see *The Exorcist*, so inevitably they unleash a demonic force in their home when they mess with a homemade hotline to unfriendly spirits. Janet Hodgson lives with her single mother and three siblings in a rundown house in Enfield. When Janet starts to go bump in the night by being lifted out of her bed and planted downstairs in the living room, paranormal investigators the

Warrens travel to England to see if they can help.

This isn't supposed to be your average haunting. The fact that the Hodgson family are poor and English is supposed to make a difference. But actually, they still live in a typical house with large bedrooms full of things to smash, a living room with a spooky rocking chair in the corner, and the all-important set of stairs that can creak whenever anything (supernatural or otherwise) steps on them. The accents might be different and the walls could do with a

lick of paint, but this is still your average haunted house movie.

As a result, director James Wan feels like he's repeating himself, ticking off tropes (Ouija boards, zoetrope, demonic voices) and coming up with little that is surprising. It's lucky then that Wan is such an accomplished director, especially when it comes to the look of the film. Returning to horror after his brief foray into mega-budget blockbuster territory on *Furious 7* (and expertly bringing back Paul Walker from the dead), Wan is on safe, familiar but fantastic form. There's an over-reliance on cranking out frequent LOUD NOISES for jump scares, but the cinematography, sound design, score and editing are all generally impressive.

If you've seen the *Insidious* films or the previous *Conjuring* film, you'll realise that this is a film haunted by plenty of old tricks. Fortunately, that doesn't make it any less tense. That's mostly down to Wan's technical mastery, but it's also due to the characters. After a fairly pointless prologue in the infamous Amityville house, it is an hour before the returning Warrens actually get involved with the Hodgson family in their Enfield home. That gives us plenty of time to be creeped

out by poltergeist activity, possession and demonic nuns. The kids are petrified, while single mum Peggy (Frances O'Connor) is at a loss as to how to deal with the menacing presence.

Even though they might be terrorised throughout, this is a horror film with an incredibly low body count. Perhaps that explains the Amityville prologue, which offers a bit of blood before the slow burn spooky scares of the remainder of the film. Wan is a director that can do these kind of scares with his eyes closed, but what he needs is a better script to help him back up to his peak.

Despite its 'cor blimey' characters and economically deprived family, *The Conjuring 2* is a very generic haunted house movie only slightly elevated by Wan's extremely confident handling of the material. It will scare the socks off you in the cinema, but it won't haunt you all the way home. Recommended for fans of the first, but don't expect anything as clever as Wan's *Saw*.

PETE TURNER

EXPECTED +++++++ 7

ACTUAL +++++++ 7



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REVIEWED AND RATED



KILLER DAMES: TWO GOTHIC CHILLERS FROM EMILIO P. MIRAGLIA

DUAL / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: EMILIO MIRAGLIA / SCREENPLAY: EMILIO MIRAGLIA, FABIO PITTORRU, MASSIMO FELISATTI / STARRING: ANTHONY STEFFEN, MARINA MALFATTI, ERIKA BLANC, GIACOMO ROSSI STUART, BARBARA BOUCHET, UGO PAGLIAI, SYBIL DANNING / RELEASED: OUT NOW

Not so long ago, we were reviewing the giallo classic *Death Walks on High Heels* (1971) and remarked that it was perhaps the only time a pair of thigh-high boots were integral to the plot of a movie. We were wrong.

Yes, those wonderful people at Arrow Video have got a new giallo release and this time it's Emilio Miraglia who's getting the boxset treatment. An interesting variation from the usual giallo plots here, as in both cases they appear to have supernatural explanations. But they're still giallo so it's not really a spoiler if we tell you that, just like *Scooby Doo*, they both turn out to be people in rubber masks who would have gotten away with it if it wasn't for those stylish Italians. Whether or not it turns out to be the second person they meet or not, we won't reveal, because to be honest we've already taken the *Scooby Doo* comparison too far.

In *The Night Evelyn Came out of the Grave* (1971), Alan (Anthony Steffen) is bonkers and sadistically murders redheads in revenge for his dead wife's infidelity (committed while she was alive before anyone asks silly questions). This is where those boots come in, because he always makes them wear the same pair before he kills them. Only thing is, we have

absolutely no idea why. Is the explanation on the cutting room floor? Did we drift off during a vital bit of exposition? Who can say? Anyway, next thing we know his wife is beckoning him from the family crypt while looking suitably dead. Could it be his family are trying to drive him mad so they can claim his inheritance? Well, he seems pretty mad in the first place but hey-ho.

Actually this one is pretty good if we don't dwell on the plot too much. Creepy and a bit naughty with the usual satisfying giallo ending (even if it's a bit amoral).

The Red Queen Kills Seven Times (1972) features a family curse and another inheritance. The titular queen comes back from the dead every hundred years and kills, er, seven times. Could these latest killings be her work? Or could they be the work of a dead sibling who was accidentally killed by Kitty (Barbara Bouchet) and hidden in the basement? Or could it be one of the glamorous employees from the fashion magazine dressed up in a red cloak? What do you think? And yes, there's lots of fashion photography. This is giallo, what were you expecting?

The plot in this one is possibly even more complicated to explain than usual, so just enjoy the glamour and the thrills, not

to mention some wild Italian fashion.

As it's giallo, both these movies feature fantastic cinematography full of retina-burning colours (hence the usual giallo quota of redheads) and so look great on Blu-ray. Top-notch sexiness, goriness and convoluted plotness. Thank you Arrow, keep 'em coming.

Extras: Audio commentaries / Interviews / Trailers / Collectors' Booklet

JOHN KNOTT

***** 8





IT! THE TERROR FROM BEYOND SPACE (1958)

DVD + BD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: EDWARD L. CAHN / SCREENPLAY: JEROME BIXBY / STARRING: MARSHALL THOMPSON, SHIRLEY PATTERSON, KIM SPALDING, ANN DORAN, DABBS GREER / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

If not for the fact that it famously inspired Dan O'Bannon to write the script for *Alien* twenty years later, it's unlikely that *It! The Terror From Beyond Space* would have found a niche for itself in the history of science-fiction movies. Despite its claustrophobic setting and its occasional sense of threat and isolation, *It!* isn't all that because, even by 1950s B-movie standards, the monster's a bit ropey, largely incompetent and quite clearly a man lumbering about in a rubber

suit waving his arms around.

Far in the future – 1973! – a manned mission to Mars is in trouble. All the crew are dead, apart from Colonel Edward Carruthers (Thompson), and a rescue mission has arrived to bring him home to face a court martial. He's suspected of killing the rest of his crew to conserve rations, not knowing if and when a rescue mission will arrive (shades of *The Martian*). Carruthers, however, insists that a hostile Martian

life form slaughtered all his colleagues. Not unreasonably, no one aboard the rescue ship believes him – until the humanoid lizard-like creature emerges from the depths of the ship, where it's been hiding since gaining access through an engine vent, and starts to pick off the crew.

It's a good, straightforward story, of course, but *It!* is scuppered by weak direction, which fails to make the most of its potential and throws away any and every opportunity to make its predatory alien even remotely threatening. It all looks reasonably promising at first, with the odd claw revealed here and there, the occasional shadow promising something visceral and terrifying. But it rapidly goes off the boil when the monster – which looks as if it's getting in an early audition for the 1960s *Irwin Allen* rubber-monsterfest *Lost in Space* – starts rushing about the ship roaring and waving its claws ineffectually, and making no effort to move or look like an alien life-form, resembling nothing so much as a bored stunt man in an

uncomfortable monster costume. The multi-levelled design of the spaceship interior set is ingenious but offers little opportunity for real excitement. One character spends an inordinate amount of time hiding virtually in plain sight behind a pipe, waving a blowtorch in the creature's face, as it makes half-hearted attempts to get him out.

The tension improves slightly as the astronauts suit up and hide away, as far as they can, from the approaching creature, and the finale will provide an extra frisson for those who have already recognised the film's core resemblance to *Alien*. But *It!* remains sluggish, visually drab and, despite its cultural significance within the genre, rather forgettable and distinctly one-note. Worth a look just to see where a genuine classic was born, and even though it's little over an hour long, it seems quite a bit longer.

PAUL MOUNT



JUSTICE LEAGUE VS. TEEN TITANS

DVD + BD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: SAM LIU / SCREENPLAY: BRYAN Q. MILLER, ALAN BURNETT / STARRING: STUART ALLEN, JASON O'MARA, TAISSA FARMIGA, JON BERNTHAL, JAKE T. AUSTIN, KARI WAHLGREN, CHRISTOPHER GORHAM, ROSARIO DAWSON, JERRY O'CONNELL / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Existing in the world that was technically created during the post-credits of Jay Oliva's excellent *Justice League: The Flashpoint Paradox*, the plot of *Justice League vs. Teen Titans* centres on, you guessed it, a butting of heads between some of DC's biggest names and their young protégés.

The key to the action here is Damian Wayne (Allen). When his 'Damian knows best' mentality causes the Justice League to lose a major lead, Batman (O'Mara) decides that it's time for his son to

spend some time with the Teen Titans. Whilst his arrogance and untrusting nature cause problems, this latest Robin finds himself having to adjust to the team dynamic and work with his fellow Titans as they are faced with the threat of a Trigon-influenced Justice League. Simply put, Trigon (Bernthal) wants the Titans' Raven (Farmiga), and he's taken over the minds of Superman (O'Connell), Wonder Woman (Dawson), The Flash (Gorham) and Cyborg (Shemar Moore) in his attempts to get

her. Batman? As ever, Bruce is one step ahead of the game.

It has to be said, *Justice League vs. Teen Titans* is, without doubt, a fun movie. Sure, considering that the dark and troubled Raven and Trigon are at the core of the story here, Sam Liu's latest offering has its fairly grim and brooding moments, but the fantastic use of Damian Wayne/Robin means that there's always something slightly lighter around the corner.

Since being brought into this animated realm, Damian has been a breath of fresh air, and that is something that continues here, with his arrogant, cocksure nature a joy to see play out, particularly as this gets him in some pretty hot water with the already-established Teen Titans group. And on that front, it's great to see characters such as Starfire (Wahlgren), Beast Boy (Brandon Soo Hoo), Blue Beetle (Austin) and, of course, Raven get their time in the spotlight.

Liu's *Justice League vs. Teen Titans* manages to dazzle in how it's a JL effort that does wonders when giving attention to its non-Justice League characters. In fact, bar the Caped Crusader, the film largely stutters and suffers when the Justice

League are on screen.

Justice League vs. Teen Titans is another win for the DC Animated Universe, and it's a prime example of how the guys behind these offerings keep delivering fresh and engaging efforts that bring in casual viewers with their use of big name characters whilst also allowing some scope for some of the lesser-known DC faces to have their time in the sun. Added to this, the film itself looks stunning in its fluidity, making the action and explosiveness of certain moments stand out even more, yet also allowing for ample intrigue and low-key atmospherics for some of the movie's more personable and sincere moments. This is certainly one that any DC fans should look to add to their collections, with casual fans also having plenty here to sink their teeth into.

Extras: Three featurettes / Episode of *Batman: The Brave and the Bold* / Episode of *Teen Titans* / Sneak peek at *Batman: The Killing Joke* / Robin figure

ANDREW POLLARD





THE ASSASSIN

DVD + BD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: HOU HSIAO-HSIEN / SCREENPLAY: HOU HSIAO-HSIEN, CHU TIEN-WEN, HSIEH HAI-MENG / STARRING: SHU QI, CHANG CHEN, ZHOU YUN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The Palme D'or Best Director winner and *Sight and Sound* magazine's best film of 2015, *The Assassin* comes laboured with plaudits and expectations. But can it deliver on them?

Snatched when she was ten years old, Yiniang (Shu Qi) was trained as a deadly assassin. After failing a mission due to her empathy, she is sent back to her homeland where she is ordered to kill her former intended husband, Tian Ji'an (Chang Chen).

Firstly, we must address a misleading idea of what *The*

Assassin may be like. From its title and trailer, it appears that *The Assassin* is an action and martial arts-heavy film that will have pulses racing and, though it is a wuxia movie, this is not the case. It is a much more meditative and introspective film. The few fight scenes that appear are entertaining and well-choreographed, suddenly erupting and over quite quickly. They are much more grounded and realistic than the high-wire fights of *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* or the blood-gushing violence of samurai films like *Zatoichi*, though a strange

and distracting use of magic and mysticism later in the film plays against this stylistic choice. If you're after an all-fighting action film, this is not it.

Certainly, *The Assassin* has a languid pace, moving slowly - and often quietly due to a sparsely used score - through its scenes and stories, often just focusing on people or places which don't seem to be doing a lot; this may be quite a big turn off for some viewers, making the film seem like a chore rather than a pleasure. However, the film has an almost hypnotic feeling that draws you in and caresses you, leading you through its hour and forty minute running time without ever really feeling like it's dragging its heels. The *Assassin* is often gorgeous to look at, with its exquisite production design showing off the beautiful architecture and the elegant costumes of Ancient China, which often add a splash of colour to the screen, as do the wonderful landscape shots seen in the forest, waterfall and cliffside scenes.

The film has a predominantly smaller aspect ratio than many, the older style 4:3 that is much squarer than the usual widescreen aspect,

and this lends itself to the film's scope. Films set in China that involve warring factions and families are often quite epic in scope, taking in armies and grand palaces, but *The Assassin* is a much more drawn-in story, concerning itself with the relationship and history of the eponymous assassin Yiniang and the family that have wronged her. The camera peeks at and views the action from a human level, making the viewer feel like they are watching through Yiniang's spying eyes. Occasionally, the view is partially obscured, like when we view a conversation through breeze-touched curtains, reinforcing this feeling of voyeurism. This scope does mean that the film gently glides you through its story before ending not with a bang and not quite a whimper but more of a gentle exhale.

The Assassin is a mesmerising and gorgeous film that you have to let yourself get wrapped up in. Don't go expecting *Kill Bill* and you might find a lot to enjoy.

COURTNEY BUTTON



DARK SIGNAL

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: EDWARD EVER-SWINDELL / SCREENPLAY: EDWARD EVER-SWINDELL / STARRING: SIWAN MORRIS, GARETH DAVID-LLOYD, JOANNA IGNACZEWSKA / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Dark Signal, the débüt feature from writer/director Edward Evers-Swindell (with *Dog Soldiers'* Neil Marshall on executive production duties), is a brooding, atmospheric slasher/ghost story hybrid, set in the wilderness of North Wales and, to its credit, it hits or at least attempts to hit the spot more often than it doesn't, thanks to sprightly direction and a game cast. But its aspirations are somewhat hampered by a sluggish and often unfocused script, a batch of tough-to-root-for characters and, fatally, its

delivery of a bogeyman who appears to have no motivation for his boorish behaviour and who, as a consequence, is difficult to find especially interesting or scary.

In a nicely developed set-up, North Wales is being terrorised by a murderer who likes to hack off his victims' wedding ring fingers. Two convergent storylines see low-rent radio DJ Lawrie (Morris) making her final broadcast with the help of her wide-eyed technician Ben (David-Lloyd) and, to spice up their last show, they've wheeled

in plausible psychic Carla (Fulci/Angerto icon Cinzia Monreale) to attempt to commune with the dead. When Carla appears to make contact with a tortured soul *from beyond the grave*, it's easy to understand why Ken Bruce never pulls similar stunts on his Radio 2 show. Elsewhere, Kate (Ignaczewska) is acting as a getaway driver for her dodgy boyfriend Nick (Duncan Pow), as he tries to recover a wodge of cash he's owed by a client. But she finds herself stranded in the middle of nowhere, receiving visitations both earthly and unearthly.

In theory this is good meaty stuff, with plenty of dramatic potential, but somewhere along the line the film loses its sense of direction and purpose and begins to drift alarmingly where it should be racketing up the tension and jangling our nerves. The two storylines take an age to come together and rely too often on cheesy clichéd jump scares - look, something snarling has sprung out of the darkness! - and moments of turn-away-from-the-screen violence which seem to have been flung into the mix just to keep our interest from flagging. Fortunately, the

last act, where everything finally comes together, makes sticking with *Dark Signal* worthwhile with an explosive and wincingly brutal confrontation between the murdering psychopathic lunatic and his final potential victim.

Dark Signal benefits enormously from gutsy performances from its cast, with Siwan Morris as the jaded, cynical, crisp-obsessed Lawrie working well with *Torchwood's* David-Lloyd's keen-as-mustard Ben. Veteran star James Cosmo delivers a typically bearish cameo (even though he might well have stepped straight from the set of the recent dark BBC2 drama *Stag*) but Ignaczewska struggles to evoke much sympathy as the beleaguered Kate, even when her circumstances take a turn for the worse. Tautly directed and deftly exploiting its cold, remote, dark locations, *Dark Signal* will provide a few thrills and the odd spill but it's not, in the end, one which will linger long in the memory.

PAUL MOUNT





THE LAST COMMAND (1928)

DUAL / CERT: PG / DIRECTOR: JOSEF VON STERNBERG / SCREENPLAY: JOHN F. GOODRICH / STARRING: EMIL JANNINGS, EVELYN BRENT, WILLIAM POWELL / RELEASED: OUT NOW

The very first Academy Awards were in 1929 and the best actor prize went to German Emil Jannings. Recipients were told in advance back in those days and as Jannings was planning on going home to Germany, he asked if he could have it early. Three months early, in fact. The Academy obliged, so he actually became the first person to receive an Oscar, ever. If you're wondering why we're telling you this, then it's because the movie he won it for was the silent classic *The Last Command*, directed by the legendary Josef

von Sternberg.

There's a movie-within-a-movie and director Leo Andreyev (Powell) is looking for the perfect Russian to play a general in his latest extravaganza when he comes across a photo of Sergius Alexander (Jannings). He has no acting experience but he claims to be a former Russian general himself, not to mention cousin to Tsar Nicholas II. The revolution of ten years earlier may have killed Nicholas and his immediate family but it brought the now sorry figure of Alexander to Hollywood. Nobody

believes this old man with a nervous tick is a real general except Andreyev, but how does he know and why cast a non-actor? The movie then flashes back to Russia just before the revolution, when Alexander was a feared and respected general and Andreyev was a Bolshevik actor. Yes, they've met before. Alexander has Andreyev arrested but takes his colleague Natalie Dabrova (Brent) as his lover, despite information that she is the more dangerous revolutionary.

To say any more would be a shame because we'd hate to ruin the story on this one. Old it may be, but not many have seen it nowadays and it's a real gem. Let's just say that while the bullying Alexander is set up as a villain and the revolutionaries the heroes, things get turned on their head more than once and our sympathies are rather cleverly thrown about as we learn how the general got that tick and became a broken man.

Modern audiences might be familiar with silent fare such as *Nosferatu* (1922) or the even more contemporaneous *Metropolis* (1927) but, to be honest, *The Last Command* is superior to both. This is silent movies at their zenith just before

the short but bumpy transition to sound. The story is intriguing, the direction tight and the wordless acting pitch-perfect. Jannings delivers a modern and harrowing performance, while slipping into brilliantly judged melodrama for the climax. As for Evelyn Brent, she was very much von Sternberg's go-to actress at the time, but he was about to discover Marlene Dietrich and despite a decent transfer to talkies, Evelyn was soon overshadowed. So watch this and get her at her peak, when she was not only a great actress but also one of the foxiest women to grace the silver screen. Can we say that? [She'd be 114 now so I reckon she'd be OK with that, especially as you're such a fan – Ed.]

Extras: Interview with critic Tony Rayns / *Sternberg Till '29* (a video essay by scholar Tag Gallagher) / 32-page booklet featuring an excerpt from von Sternberg's autobiography *Fun in a Chinese Laundry* / Two original reviews from 1928 / a 1929 profile of Jannings / archival images

JOHN KNOTT



INTRUDERS

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: ADAM SCHINDLER / SCREENPLAY: T.J. CIMFEL, DAVID WHITE / STARRING: BETH RIESGRAF, RORY CULKIN, JACK KESY / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Anna is an agoraphobic, a condition brought on by a childhood trauma. Ever since her parents died, she has lived with her brother in their family home. Now her brother is dead and Anna's illness is so severe that she can't even muster the courage to leave the house and attend his funeral. But J.P. Perry and Vance don't know that. Anna's delivery boy has told them she has a lot of money stored in the house and, on

the day of the funeral when they expect the house to be empty, they break in. But despite her illness, Anna is not as vulnerable as she seems, and a deadly cat and mouse game begins. As the hunters become the hunted, it is terrifyingly obvious that Anna and her house both have their secrets. A combination of *Wait Until Dark*, *Panic Room* and - but only in a minor way - the original *Saw*, *Intruders* is a

flawed film that could have been so much more.

Beth Riesgraf, as Anna, gives a fantastic performance. She really is director Adam Schindler's secret weapon and she doesn't let him down. The opening scenes are particularly well developed and her character is intricately fascinating. But the premise starts to unravel as soon as the thieves arrive and the movie becomes a generic scuttling-around-hidden-passageways thriller. Suddenly Anna becomes another cookie-cutter victim-who-fights-back and for quite a long stretch of time, the film seems less interested in her and more interested in the raiders, which weakens it considerably. Maybe because we lose Anna's point of view, the story loses its tension, although the moment when she realises the men are coming to break in and her agoraphobia won't allow her to escape the house is a great sequence that really delivers. As for the thieves themselves, they're the usual crew - blandly swaggering from room to room, falling into Anna's traps, and not as intimidating as they should be (even though

Perry acts the hard-man with Anna's budgie, which results in a pretty unpleasant decapitated budgie close-up).

In short, as soon as the men arrive we're just waiting for them to die and the deaths themselves are understated but effective. If Schindler and his writers had kept the focus on Anna and resisted all the gimmicks, this might have been a compelling character study of a woman whose trauma is teetering on the edge of psychopathy. As it is, despite all the trappings (literally) of her booby-trapped home, and a third act revelation that, if hardly original, is quite well done and seems psychologically true, Anna never quite gets there as the revenging heroine.

With a little more script development and a little less *Home Alone* meets *The Cabin in the Woods*, *Intruders* could have been a very good film. As it is, it's definitely worth a watch but not the must-see it might have been.

IAN WHITE





HIRED TO KILL (1990)

BD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: NICO MASTORAKIS, PETER RADER / SCREENPLAY: NICO MASTORAKIS, FRED C. PERRY, KIRK ELLIS / STARRING: GEORGE KENNEDY, BRIAN THOMPSON, OLIVER REED / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Arrow's new Blu-ray release of 1990's *Hired To Kill*, from schlocky Greek director Nico Mastorakis, comes in a nice box with a slick mustardy-hued artwork cover which, with its preponderance of helicopters, explosions, and bikini-clad lovelies, makes the film look like an undiscovered Bond classic. Interviewed in one of the two-disc set's special features, Mastorakis is talking about his film's star – 'actor' Brian Thompson – and he briefly forgets his name; Thompson is married to his daughter and is the father of Mastorakis'

grandchildren. It's an anecdote which provides blessed relief from the purgatory of watching this jaw-droppingly inept and witless film and in many ways made the whole tortuous experience – much of which was spent hiding behind a cushion cringing at the lousy script and far worse acting – very nearly tolerable.

Our hunky hero, mercenary Frank Ryan (Thompson) is lounging about in his pants on his boat and – just to prove his credentials as a real man – he whips out his pistol (oo-er) and shoots his alarm clock when

it has the temerity to... well, sound its alarm. Stupid alarm clock. You don't mess with Frank Ryan. Ryan is recruited to infiltrate the island stronghold of a tyrannical South American despot (played by Oliver Reed, who, by this point in his career, had become transformed entirely into alcohol) and free a rebel leader (Jose Ferrer, who has the good grace to look utterly baffled in the handful of scenes he appears). The obvious way to achieve these aims, of course, is for Ryan to pose as a gay photographer working with a posse of ass-kicking supermodels (in reality – or what passes for the film's reality – tough old ex-flames of Ryan's or else jailbirds looking for a spot of redemption). At one point, perhaps to convince Reed's off-his-face Michael Bartos that he really is a gay photographer and not a tough-as-old-boots mercenary, Ryan and Bartos lock lips in perhaps the most passionless kiss in the history of cinema. Later on Ryan gets it on with a lady to the accompaniment of some magnificently inappropriate panpipe music.

Hired to Kill is an absolute, horrendous mess. The script is

woeful, the acting pretty much uniformly appalling. Thompson really hasn't a clue; his eyes are dead and his face, which looks as if his mouth has been stuffed with tennis balls, brings a new meaning to the word vacant. He's truly an odd-looking fellow. But worst of all, *Hired to Kill* is just so damned boring. Pitched as an action movie, it's worryingly dialogue-heavy – and when the dialogue is of the quality on display here, then clearly no-one's in for a good time. The film sputters into life in its last few minutes when there's a gun battle for reasons which we've temporarily forgotten and the finale, with Reed aimlessly firing his rifle at a departing helicopter, is enlivened by the fact that Reed was apparently openly urinating whilst the scene was being filmed. As critiques go, that's a tough one to beat so we won't even try.

Extras: Booklet, 4K restoration / Commentary / director interview / Brian Thompson interview / trailer / stills gallery

PAUL MOUNT



sequences mean anything. A number of subplots and subtexts are introduced but there's little development of any of them, such that the mystery itself becomes increasingly linear as the plot progresses.

Even Evey and David make for a surprisingly colourless couple, exhibiting little chemistry and even less charisma; guest actors such as Eva Longoria and Blade Runner's Joanna Cassidy turn up and disappear again without making an impression, despite the latter's too obviously deliberately eccentric role. Gillian Jacobs as Sadie, the friend Evey makes at pre-natal yoga, instantly steals every scene she's in, outperforming almost everybody by the end of the film.

This is far from a disaster, and the haunting sequences themselves are mostly very effective if overly clichéd, but a little more care and attention could have produced something much more memorable.

JR SOUTHALL



VISIONS

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: KEVIN GREUTERT / SCREENPLAY: L.D. GOFFIGAN, LUCAS SUSSMAN / STARRING: ISLA FISHER, ANSON MOUNT, GILLIAN JACOBS, JOANNA CASSIDY / RELEASE DATE: JUNE 20TH

Like two pebbles hitting the water at opposite ends of a pond simultaneously, *Visions* is bookended by two dramatic incidents that ripple towards one another throughout the rest of the film, creating an interesting jigsaw puzzle that is somehow less than the sum of its parts.

Isla Fisher, presumably sporting a portrait in her attic having barely aged a day since *Home and Away* two decades

ago, plays Evey, the survivor of a horrific car accident that took the life of the baby travelling in the other vehicle. One year on, Evey's husband David is buying a Californian vineyard in an attempt to kick-start a new career, but once the couple – now expecting a baby of their own – move in, Evey begins having visions suggesting a violent history for the property. The trouble is, while previous



THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES (1939)

BD / CERT: PG / DIRECTOR: SIDNEY LANFIELD / SCREENPLAY: ERNEST PASCAL / STARRING: RICHARD GREENE, BASIL RATHBONE, NIGEL BRUCE, WENDY BARRIE, LIONEL ATWILL, JOHN CARRADINE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

No literary character has been made it onto film as many times as Sherlock Holmes. To be honest, we haven't researched that at all [not like you – Ed] so that might not actually be true. But you get the idea. He's been in a lot of movies, TV series and even radio adaptations. But, while some will cite Brett, Cushing, Lee or even Cumberbatch as the definitive

Holmes, to some of us it will always be Basil Rathbone with Nigel Bruce as the indomitable (and entirely inaccurate) Watson at his side.

Between 1939 and 1946 they made fourteen together but what is sometimes forgotten is that the first two were very different from the rest. They were made by 20th Century Fox with a decent budget and

were actually set in the correct Victorian period. The rest were B-movies banged out by Universal and set in the (then) present day in order to join in with the (understandably) popular pastime of defeating the Nazis. Don't get us wrong, they were still fun, but they lacked a bit of authenticity and were occasionally even set in America. But *The Hound of the Baskervilles* was the first and it's about the only one to even stick vaguely to the original plot.

We're not going to go into that plot though because we're sure you know it. But if you're familiar with the later ones, the first thing you notice here is the relatively stellar cast. Rathbone and Bruce don't even top the bill as that goes to Richard Greene as the titular Sir Henry [he's the dog? – Ed]. And then, despite this being 20th Century Fox, we get the Universal stalwarts of Lionel Atwill and John Carradine. The Rathbone/Bruce dynamic that gave the series its popularity is quickly established with the "who would own a walking stick like this?" routine (Watson gets it all wrong) and a million Conon Doyle enthusiasts presumably

all groaned at how this bumbling Watson was nothing like the character from the books. But Bruce's Watson is so lovable (Bruce was a genuinely great comic actor) that he ended up exaggerating it for the rest of the series and many people still think of Watson that way even though he hasn't been played like that since.

So what else? Wonderful atmosphere in both the London streets and on the pretty-well-done studio-bound Moors set; Rathbone doing his brilliant 'master of disguise' act (although he actually surpassed that in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* later the same year); lots of fog; a big dog, and it's on Blu-ray. Not much more we can say than that other than to bemoan the fact that we're going to have to replace our old DVD boxset.

Extras: Interview with Sir Christopher Frayling / Interview with Basil Rathbone biographer Michael Druxman

JOHN KNOTT



ENEMY MINE (1985)

BD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: WOLFGANG PETERSEN / SCREENPLAY: EDWARD KHMARA / STARRING: DENNIS QUAID, LOUIS GOSSETT JR., BRION JAMES, RICHARD MARCUS / RELEASE DATE: JUNE 20TH

This 1985 science fiction drama from Wolfgang Petersen, hot on the heels of *Das Boot* and *The NeverEnding Story*, must have seemed like a sure-fire hit at the time. A hot director, a sexy young star, a recent Oscar winner to add gravity to the whole thing, plus an allegorical tale to appeal to the intellect and warm the heart. Fox must have been expecting the box office tills to be chiming.

But a troubled production, which included Petersen being brought on board after a week of shooting with original director

Richard Loncraine was scrapped and that helmsman fired, a massive overspend on the budget and less than ecstatic reviews resulted in *Enemy Mine* disappearing pretty quickly down a mine-sized hole.

And, strangely, it has stayed buried there ever since, with no re-appraisal via the home cinema market, which so many other and, frankly less enjoyable, box office flops seem to have achieved. This Blu-ray release dusts off the cobwebs and gives you a chance to judge for yourself

whether the film's neglect is warranted or otherwise.

In the future, deep space colonisation by humans results in a war with the Dracs, an amphibious race doing the same thing. Following a battle, gung-ho fighter Dennis Quaid shoots down an enemy ship onto an unknown planet and crash lands there himself. The Drac he shot down is, however, still alive. With little hope of rescue, the two enemies can either continue the war and kill each other, or learn to live together to survive in a hostile environment neither the elements nor an underground beastly with a very big mouth doesn't mind if it's a human or a Drac that gets it first.

As the story progresses and, you guessed it, the enemies become friends, relying on each other and learning about each other's culture and lives, there's a surprise in store when the asexual Drac reveals it is going to have a baby. And when the chance of escape does come, it's in the form of a mercenary mine craft occupied by humans who use captured Dracs as slaves.

With Quaid and, fresh from his Oscar win in *An Officer and a Gentleman*, Louis Gossett Jr. as the human and the Drac, both

actors give fully committed performances - a good job, as it's mainly the two of them on screen for most of the running time. Quaid convinces as both a hot head and, later, a man who sees through his own prejudice. Gossett, unrecognisable under some pretty outstanding scaly make-up courtesy of Chris Walas (who would win an Oscar a year later for *The Fly*), fascinates as the reptilian creature who is, ultimately, more civilised than the human being.

There's no denying the theme of racism which underpins the whole thing – the Dracs all seem to be played by black actors and when you see them being whipped at the mine, slaves to human masters, the point is rammed home.

The effects are lovely; even the ones that have dated poorly just feel charming. A few years after telling the *Blade Runner* himself that it's 'time to die', Brion James makes a suitably nasty villain and, if the story ties itself up a little too neatly, in the end, the ambition of the piece is all over the screen.

ROBERT MARTIN





HAIL, CAESAR!

DVD + BD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTORS & SCREENPLAY: JOEL & ETHAN COEN / STARRING: GEORGE CLOONEY, JOSH BROLIN, ALDEN EHRENREICH, SCARLETT JOHANSSON, RALPH FIENNES, CHANNING TATUM, FRANCES McDORMAND, TILDA SWINTON / RELEASE DATE: JULY 11TH

Old Hollywood, film sets, film directing, film production... and a kidnapping? That sounds like pure gold for the Coen Brothers, and surprisingly, *Hail, Caesar!* may be the most serious comedy of 2016. Despite being a dark parody about the Hollywood industry in the 1950s, at its core, it actually tackles a complex and true human dilemma: how to live a life of faith and service in a stressful and corrupt modern world. The Coens use 1950s Hollywood as that symbol of modernity, where despite the glamour and panache of moviemaking, there's something

crazy and uncontrollable beneath the surface.

It's presented to us as a light-hearted comedy that takes a stab at capturing the foibles of how people behaved within Hollywood; we see the larger-than-life sins at play, like immorality, stupidity, intoxication and the like; all general failings of humanity. It presents those themes perfectly in darkly comic fashion, setting them against the dramatic backdrop, as well as the parasitic gossip publication industry, as personified by Tilda Swinton's twin gossip columnists. But at the core, it's about a hard-working man

who is caught in a dilemma of his own in the form of a choice between two jobs: either continue working as the amoral and illegal 'fixer' of Hollywood or take up a far easier and more financially rewarding job in order to spend more time with his family.

Despite the weighty subtext, the Coens succeed by injecting that quirky, offbeat humour they are famous for, as the film is superbly charming, witty and hilarious all the way through. There are plenty of comedic highlights that pack a punch and stick with you long after the film is finished, whether it's George Clooney chewing the scenery for all it's worth, Tilda Swinton being hilariously deadpan, Channing Tatum being an absolute goofball, or Ralph Fiennes trying to teach Alden Ehrenreich the art of dramatic acting ("Would that it were so simple"). Also, the three-minute sequence where a diverse religious group (a Catholic priest, a rabbi, an Eastern Orthodox priest, and a Protestant minister) debate the acceptability of the movie studio's depiction of God is pure dynamite.

There are certain sections that are gems, in which the Coens attempt to pay homage to the classic era of Hollywood, with Johansson's synchronised

swimming sequence harking back to Esther Williams, Tatum's Gene Kelly-esque song and dance routine, and the production of *Hail, Caesar!* itself a direct parody of dramatic epic movies such as *Spartacus*. Roger Deakins' visual artistry is beautiful to behold, and further goes to show why this man is an unsung hero in the art of cinematography. The performances throughout are all charming and play off against the Coens' script perfectly, with Brolin lending real weight and gravitas to the role of Eddie Mannix, whilst rising star Ehrenreich is brilliantly witty as he bounces off against real acting heavyweights like Brolin and Fiennes. No wonder this guy's going to be the young Han Solo!

Charming, witty, and packed with underlying emotional beats, *Hail, Caesar!* is a rich film that is packed with gorgeous period detail and a cast that fits perfectly into their respective roles. This is a solid gem in the Coen Brothers' unique filmography and manages to be a whimsical love letter to Hollywood's Golden Age.

RYAN POLLARD



PENDA'S FEN (1974)

DVD + BD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: ALAN CLARKE / SCREENPLAY: DAVID RUDKIN / STARRING: SPENCER BANKS, JOHN ATKINSON, GEORGINE ANDERSON / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Stephen (Spencer Banks) is a teenager growing up amidst the rural beauty of Pinvin, a picturesque village overshadowed by the Malvern Hills. He is an uptight young man, fervently nationalistic and deeply Christian, who resents anything that threatens the right-wing establishment – especially his nearest neighbours, a television writer

and his wife, who defend striking workers, question what sinister plans the government might have for the local countryside, and – in Stephen's view – must be abnormal, because they are unable to have children.

But, privately, Stephen is in turmoil. He is struggling with his sexuality and secretly beginning to question the world around him. His grip on reality

is slipping away. His fascination with Edward Elgar's orchestral work *The Dream of Gerontius* is inspiring nightmares of angels and demons, and he wanders into a grove where men, women, and children smile serenely as their hands are severed on a chopping block. Before long, a chance meeting with the long-dead Elgar, a portentous hilltop encounter with King Penda – the last pagan King of England – and shocking revelations about his own genesis will threaten to shatter Stephen's world completely.

Penda's Fen caused a sensation when it was originally televised in 1974, and it is easy to see why. It is a powerful piece of filmmaking that defies categorisation. It is, by turns, surreal, political, mythological, magical and a multi-layered character study of a conflicted adolescent on the brink of sexual and ideological transformation. Some reviewers have called it a 'folk horror' and, because of its pagan elements and its subtle underlying thread of theological conflict, believe that *Penda's Fen*

shares some of its DNA with *The Wicker Man*. Given that *Penda's Fen* was broadcast only four months after *The Wicker Man* was released, the comparisons are understandable, but don't really hold up. The two films might touch briefly upon similar themes but they are very different animals, albeit equally disturbing and impressive.

Penda's Fen is not only a landmark of British television. It is also a reminder of how great British television used to be, when writers and directors were allowed full unfettered rein to work their craft and the results, although sometimes challenging and uncomfortable to watch, were almost always intelligent, thought-provoking, and deeply personal leaps of the imagination. This is all that and more, and if you are serious about cinema the BFI's fabulous new Blu-ray presentation is definitely not to be missed.

IAN WHITE





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AUDIOSTATIC

THE LATEST NEWS
FROM THE WORLD OF
AUDIO ADVENTURES
BY TONY JONES



More HITCHHIKERS GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

A few short days after **Towel Day** (aka May 25), we learned the BBC has commissioned a further series of **The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy**. This will be the sixth series, and according to producer Dirk Maggs it may be on Radio 4 during 2017, making it over ten years since the last new series.

It is expected to be called **The Hexagonal Phase**, and be based on the Eoin Colfer book **And Another Thing...** This has been previously adapted for Radio 4 in 2009 and starred Stephen Mangan (who played **Dirk Gently** in the BBC series of the same name) alongside Peter Serafinowicz. No news on casting for this new version, but it is likely to include many of the original cast.

BBC Radio

Fans of quality audio have been treated with Radio 4's new season of **Dangerous Visions**. The range has been tremendous, including **Brave New World**, a new set of stories under the **Dark Vignettes** title, **News from Nowhere** and an outstanding new version of John Wyndham's **The Kraken Wakes**. Reviews on the **STARBURST** website [of course!].

Meanwhile, Radio 4 Extra has started a new (to them) series of **Doctor Who** stories from Big Finish. The first story is Colin Baker's *The Crimes of Thomas Brewster*, an excellent tale set on the London Underground. This is a great way to introduce yourself to Big Finish if you aren't already a fan, and this particular story introduces future companion Flip, played by Lisa Greenwood.

Big Finish

On to Big Finish themselves, and the biggest news this month has been the extension of their **Doctor Who/Torchwood** license until 2025. This gives plenty of time for new writers to join their ranks, and to this end, a short story competition has been launched in honour of Paul Spragg who sadly passed away in May 2014. The competition runs until the end of June and full details are on their website.

Fans might have noticed John Barrowman has been in studio with a vast range of people in three cities, recording several stories in seven consecutive days. We have an exclusive interview with director Scott Handcock elsewhere in this issue [page 74] where he gives us some insight into the newly announced **Torchwood: Outbreak** and more besides.

Bafflegab are Killing Tom Baker

In bizarre news, Paul Magrs has written a new set of stories for Bafflegab Productions, starring Tom Baker (as Tom Baker) with Katy Manning and Susan Jameson. The series is called **Baker's End** and revolves around the funeral of TV legend Tom Baker. Two episodes have been recorded so far, and the first, *The King of Cats*, should be available in September. Of the project, Tom Baker says:

*"It's so strange and funny and brisk, so brisk. I laughed a lot... I'm looking forward to it all. Dreams and nightmares and mad psychiatrists and crackpot gurus and so on. We might even come across some mad fans of *Blake's 7* or even *Doctor Who*!"*



Key titles to watch out for this month from Big Finish...

DOCTOR WHO: THE SECOND DOCTOR VOLUME 01

The Second Doctor's tenure continues to be popular, and this new collection of stories highlights several figures from the Troughton era. Original cast members Frazer Hines, Anneke Wills, Deborah Watling, and Wendy Padbury play their respective TV characters, and the show's atmosphere is replicated almost perfectly.

AVAILABLE MAY 31st

UNIT: SHUTDOWN

Kate Stewart (Jemma Radgrave) and the much-loved Osgood (Ingrid Oliver) return with another four tales that follow the adventures of UNIT, the ever-present government body from **Doctor Who**. Former Borg Queen Alice Krige even makes an appearance.

AVAILABLE JUNE 30th

SURVIVORS SERIES 04

The tales of a group trying to survive after a worldwide virus wipes out most of the population continues to be compulsive listening. Four new stories - including one written by Louise Jameson (who also appears) - keep the group in peril and looking for some semblance of hope in a hopeless world. Legendary actor Ian McCulloch reprises his '70s TV role.

AVAILABLE JUNE 30th

TORCHWOOD 2.4 MOVING TARGET

Seen only in two episodes of the TV version, Suzie Costello (Indira Varma) gets her time in the limelight with an adventure that has her as the second to last woman alive on Earth. Not only does she have to save the planet, she has to save Alex (Naomi McDonald), the actual last woman alive.

AVAILABLE JUNE 30th

DARK SHADOWS: BLOOD AND FIRE (50TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL)

A special two-hour adventure released to commemorate fifty years of the Gothic soap opera. Some of the original TV cast appear in a tale that involves a time-traveller who's tasked with destroying the Collins family legacy.

AVAILABLE JUNE 30th

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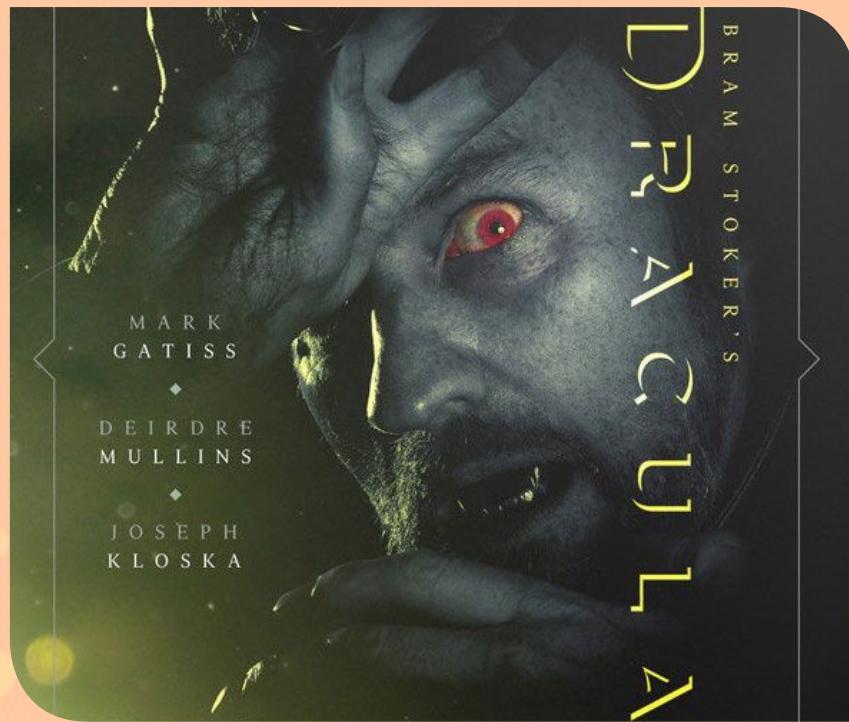
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REVIEWS

THE LATEST AUDIO
RELEASES REVIEWED
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DRACULA

AUTHOR: BRAM STOKER (DRAMATISED BY JONATHAN BARNES) / DIRECTOR: SCOTT HANDCOCK / PUBLISHER: BIG FINISH / STARRING: MARK GATISS, JOSEPH KLOSKA, DEIRDRE MULLINS, NIGEL BETTS, RUPERT YOUNG, ALEX JORDAN, DAVID MENKIN, ROSANNA MILES, ELIZABETH MORTON, IAN HALLARD, EDWARD PETHERBRIDGE, KATY MANNING / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

In an elegant exercise in good timing, Big Finish has released a new full-cast adaptation of Bram Stoker's seminal vampiric tale *Dracula*, 119 years to the day since the novel's first publication. While the anniversary tie-in adds piquancy, in some ways it might have been more fitting had this new audio been released not on the cusp of a warm, late-Spring Bank Holiday weekend but instead on some dark and mist-shrouded November evening, when the threat of winter chills the air and the pull of a warm fireside proves irresistible. That said, Big Finish's determination to stay true to the seductive, dark Gothic traditions surrounding the *Dracula* story do shine through in every aspect of this new production.

Encouraged by the success of the company's recent audio version of *Frankenstein*, this is an immersive new telling of the classic story of the undead aristocrat's desire to escape the backward isolation of rural Transylvania and relocate to the beating heart of the British Empire, where the pickings promise to be more succulent and plentiful. Horror aficionado

Mark Gatiss takes on the titular role with great enthusiasm. In a performance that is expertly judged, he adopts a measured (yet suitably mysterious) 'ancient aristocratic' accent that impresses precisely because of its restrained malevolence.

As Gatiss himself acknowledges in his behind-the-scenes interview, the icons of Bela Lugosi and Christopher Lee loom large over any actor taking on the role. In contrast to these big screen personas, Gatiss takes full advantage of the intimacy of the audio format to deliver a reading of the Count that is all the more chilling for its quiet, compelling menace, and which makes his unexpected explosive outbursts that much more powerful. Cinematic representations of *Dracula* inevitably focus the lens on the blood-sucking monster. Yet in Stoker's novel, the vampire is (particularly after the story relocates to London) not the book's central figure, and only appears at pivotal moments. Instead, the book's leading protagonists are the vampire hunters who band together to thwart and deal with The Count.

The performances of that entire

ensemble are uniformly strong, and the sound design makes good use of the drama's signature locations (a castle, a ship at sea, a graveyard, the catacombs of a church, an asylum) to reinforce the Gothic ambience of the piece. There's no arguing with the fact that Stoker's book is a literary classic, but it's not a novel with a structure or a language that seamlessly translates to the audio realm. Jonathan Barnes rises to the challenge of adapting Stoker's long and occasionally florid prose into a manageable audio script with a clear sense of focus. This is a reading which foregrounds the character of Nina Harker (a great performance from Deirdre Mullins) as one of the key characters driving the hunt for The Count; she becomes a much more pro-active co-conspirator than seen in most versions of the story. This is also a reading of the text that presents Van Helsing (a spirited turn from Nigel Betts) as an irascible and undiplomatic member of the anti-vampire team rather than its charismatic leader.

Director Scott Handcock maintains the energy and atmosphere across the three different sections of the story: young lawyer Jonathan Harker's trip to the Count's Transylvanian lair; *Dracula's* arrival in England and its deadly consequences; and the hunters pursuit of their quarry back across the continent. Using different narrative techniques (a narrator voice, diary extracts, phonographic recordings, letters), Handcock builds a strong texture to the storytelling. The opening section is the most intensely character-driven and is effectively a two-hander between a wide-eyed and increasingly anxious Harker (Joseph Kloska on convincing form) and his undead employer. Handcock does not neglect the underlying themes of blood, sex, desire, death and power, and does include some gruesome scenes (the Count's lascivious feasting on Nina is the most intense) but this is not a telling of *Dracula* dripping with gore. Rather this is a tale rich in atmosphere and possessed of a creeping sense of unease and dread, which then bursts into bloodletting and violence at decisive moments.

This release includes the bonus of a set of behind the scenes interviews with cast members and writer Barnes, as well as in-studio outtakes, and selected music-only tracks from composer James Dunlop's evocative soundtrack. This is a rich, impressive and confident production which should, for maximum chills and thrills, be devoured in a single sitting.

RICH CROSS





THE LIBERATOR CHRONICLES - VOL. 12

AUTHORS: ANDY LANE, GUY ADAMS / DIRECTOR: LISA BOWERMAN / PUBLISHER: BIG FINISH / STARRING: JAN CHAPPELL, PAUL DARROW, MICHAEL KEATING, STEVEN PACEY, DAVID WARNER / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The latest instalment of The Liberator Chronicles brings to a close the current run of this particular strand of Big Finish's Blake's 7 imprint, in confident and engaging style. The first episode "Corners of the Mind" is a tautly plotted two-hander, focusing on Avon (Paul Darrow) and Cally (Jan Chappell). On a mission to hunt for a secret ancient weapon, Avon's cover is blown and he is taken hostage by a group of archaeologists, led by the ruthless military commander (and a former nemesis of Avon's) Ariel Dortmund. As he attempts to solve a series of taxing and potentially lethal puzzles set by the creators of a hi-tech maze, he is able to contact Cally using an improvised communicator (salvaged from the desiccated remains of a former explorer), who provides support and encouragement as the Liberator races to

come within teleport range.

The conversation between the two (other crew members are referred to, but none appear on microphone) is well executed, and the storyline explores some interesting territory: Avon becomes uncharacteristically open about his past shortcomings as a solo operator (unconcerned then by the type of ideological obsessiveness that now drives Blake). Although his analytical faculties never let him down, Avon's memory begins to deteriorate as an unknown force affects his mind. Darrow revels in Avon's return to centre stage (effectively this is his story) while Chappell, although limited to the role of 'shipmate on the other end of the line', gives great value as Cally; determined to ensure Avon's survival, but continually frustrated by his archness and reckless lack of caution. Andy Lane's script serves both actors well, and the episode mixes themes of melancholy, failed ambitions and retribution to impressive effect.

The second episode "Capital" (by Guy Adams) focuses on the misadventures of Tarrant (Steven Pacey) and heralds the return both of the fearful, planet-decimating weapon the Armageddon Storm, and of Vila's estranged father, the deeply untrustworthy Solvin Tavac (astutely voiced by the ever-prolific David Warner). When a party from the Liberator returns to the ruins of outer London in the hope of sabotaging the Federation's new planet-killer, they are ambushed, drugged and captured. In prison they learn, via vid-screen, of Servalan's plan to discredit them by implicating the rebels in the destruction of planet Earth. Tarrant escapes but is injured in the process. As he struggles to repair a damaged landing craft for flight, he relates, in flashback, the story of his shipmates' efforts to locate the apocalyptic super-weapon. Pacey's performance is

energetic, and his ability to impersonate the vocal mannerisms of other members of the Liberator is striking. "Capital" has a strong action-and-adventure motif and director Lisa Bowerman makes good use of the fast-moving and tense plot to deliver this volume's most immersive soundscape.

The closing episode "Punishment" (Adam's second) switches the focus to Villa (Michael Keating), whose story begins with him under lock-and-key - a prisoner facing interrogation. Villa recounts to his gaoler the story of his (seemingly unsuccessful) attempt to locate and disable The Armageddon Storm, now threatening to decimate the home world. Keating finds just the right balance of humour, pathos, vulnerability and unlikely heroic impulses in Villa. The roguish thief enjoys a rare outright victory at the episode's end, as Villa's true role in the team's plan is revealed and as he rebuffs his unscrupulous father's self-serving bid for familial reconciliation.

The two-hander technique employed in The Liberator Chronicles works extremely well; the listener is able to buy into the dramatic conceit, without feeling in any way short-changed, thanks to the quality of the scripts and of the performances. Volume 12 signs off the current run with three strong adventures, which for the most part see this rag-tag group of space rebels come out on top, or at least emerge undefeated. In the context of Series C, the absentee figure of Blake remains, as Tarrant puts it, "the ghost that haunts the Liberator". Big Finish's announcement regarding the future audio adventures of that ship and its crew (and that of Scorpio for that matter) is keenly awaited.

RICH CROSS



JAGO & LITEFOOT SERIES 11

AUTHOR: NIGEL FAIRS, MATTHEW SWEET, SIMON BARNARD, PAUL MORRIS, JUSTIN RICHARDS / PUBLISHER: BIG FINISH / STARRING: TREVOR BAXTER, CHRISTOPHER BENJAMIN, LISA BOWERMAN, CONRAD ASQUITH, COLIN BAKER / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

With this release, Big Finish brings us the eleventh boxset for the ever-popular Victorian investigators Jago & Litefoot, as played so wonderfully by Christopher Benjamin and Trevor Baxter. This set sees

our heroes firmly fixed in London; little do they know the Master is in town and intends to use them to get to the Doctor. Yet again Big Finish hits the spot with this exquisite collection.

Nigel Fair kicks us off with Jago & Son, a delightful tale centring in no small part on a man (James Joyce) who believes he is Jago's son. If that weren't enough, we have a satanic cult and a woman from Litefoot's past – Jean Bazemore (Rowena Cooper). All these threads come to a head as an alien menace is found underground.

Second is a strange story from Matthew Sweet, in which composer Maurice Ravel is the herald for a trip to a fantastical world of doppelgängers and crazy clockwork creations.

Writers Simon Barnard and Paul Morris continue a rich vein of recent form in The Woman in White, an escapade combining Henry Irving (Edward de Souza) and Bram Stoker (Jonathan Forbes) along with another cult, more mysterious deaths and the sinister (and brilliantly conceived) Mr Manners (Robbie Stevens). This balances theatre with mystery, murder with wit and a ghostly woman to create an unforgettable whole.

Justin Richards wraps up with

Masterpiece and we learn just how the Master intends to trap the Doctor (Baker) as Jago and Litefoot enlist the help of hypnotists Madame Sosostris (Rachel Atkins) and her assistant Mr Nocturne. Where this story works well is in keeping Jago and Litefoot at its core. Yes, the Master and the Doctor are vitally important, but they never take over the story. Everything ends as it should, and there is even a little twist setting up (we hope) the next boxset.

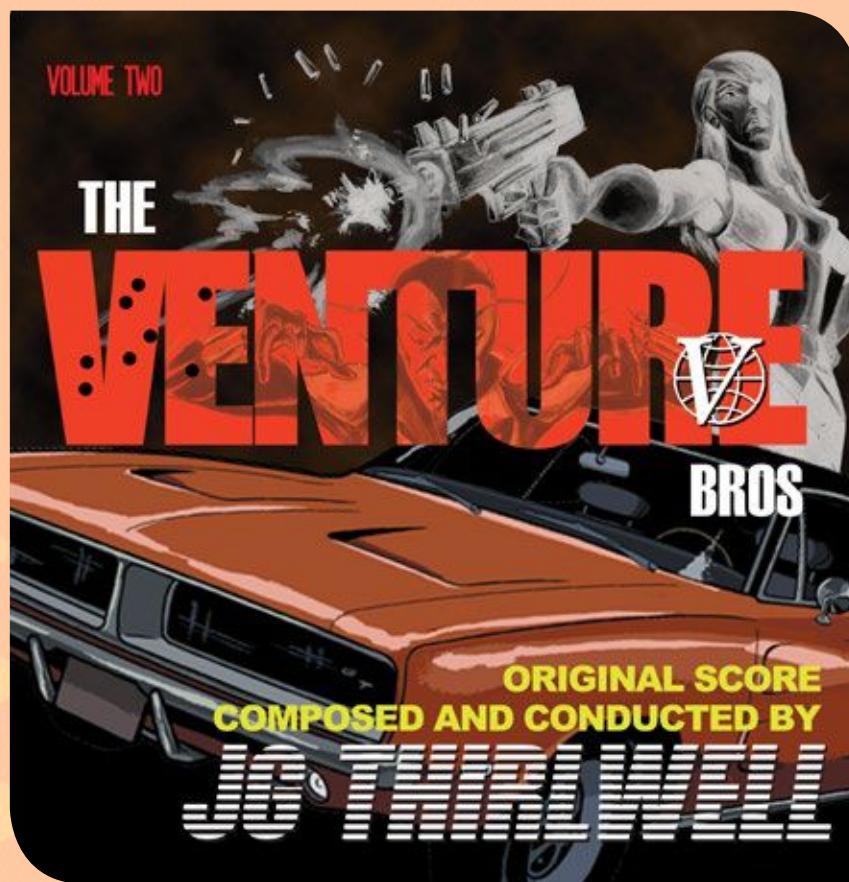
All the way through, barmaid Ellie Higson (director Lisa Bowerman) and Inspector Quick (Asquith) provide assistance and have important parts to play, as they do in every set of stories. The direction, casting, acting and music are top-notch as ever, and the standard, if anything, is better than ever.

Jago & Litefoot emerge once again largely unscathed and we have a possible twist for the next release, but we have yet to address the greatest mystery of all – why has this series not been picked up by the BBC for Radio 4 Extra?

TONY JONES



OST

THE STARBURST
GUIDE TO THE LATEST
SOUNDTRACKS
BY NICK SPACEK

It's only taken seven years, but the second volume of J. G. Thirlwell's music for *The Venture Bros.* has finally been released. Given the fact that we've waited between two and three years between each season, that seems about right. It's available on vinyl and compact disc, although the LP has three fewer tracks than the CD. The LP comes with a digital download which includes the left-off tracks, however. Given that the original vinyl edition now sells for a pretty penny on the secondary market, we'd suggest getting on this sooner rather than later.

Speaking of Thirlwell and his music, by the time you read this, the seventh season of *Archer* will have finished airing on American television. That's six and a half years on the air, and the only music we've gotten has been the *Cherlene* country album released in conjunction with the show's fifth season. Given that Thirlwell composed the music for the show's most recent spate of episodes, maybe we might see some kind of compilation in the near future? At this point, we'd honestly be happy with an EP that features Scott Sims' opening theme and the

end credits music, Mel Young's *The Killer*. Come on, FX - please?

John Ottman has once again teamed with Bryan Singer for another X-Men film. As successful as his work on *Days of Future Past* was, it's exciting to hear what Ottman has in store for *X-Men: Apocalypse*. While we'd really hoped that the film's setting would mean something somewhat related to the '90s-era animated series, we suppose the rather apocalyptic, sweepingly grandiose themes will do just fine. It's out digitally now from Sony Classical, and will be available on compact disc as this issue hits your hands.

In further team-up news, Steve Jablonsky has once again teamed with producer Michael Bay, this time for the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* sequel, *Out of the Shadows*. Jablonsky, whose scores for all of Bay's *Transformers* films could be seen to be one of the few bright spots of that series, replaces Brian Tyler, who's scoring the upcoming *Power Rangers* feature film reboot.

Invada's upcoming slate of vinyl releases

got teased by label head Redg Weeks right after we went to print last month, so you might know about it already, but for those who don't listen obsessively to podcasts and scour forums, here's the details: first up is the Season One score to the hit Netflix mini-series, *Narcos*, by Pedro Bromfman. There's also another television show, *Mr. Robot*, as done by Mac Quayle. *Narcos* is already available on CD from Lakeshore Records, with *Mr. Robot* due out later this month.

Also teased via Internet audio channels, the monthly Mondo/Death Waltz mixtape on Soundcloud offered up glimpses of Francesco De Masi's *Escape from the Bronx*, aka *The Bronx Warriors II*, as well as Fabio Frizzi's *Contraband* - an excellent pair of Italian scores if there ever were. There's also *Darling* by Giona Ostinelli, which is also currently out on compact disc via Lakeshore Records. That's a more modern score, and definitely worth taking a listen to, especially if you're fond of the likes of *The Witch* or *We Are Still Here*.

Speaking of Frizzi, Italian metal/indie/alternative label Subsound Records launched their sub-label Sub OST with his score to the Lucio Fulci splatter mess, *Manhattan Baby*. It marks the vinyl débüt of the complete score to the 1982 film, and is on 180-gram coloured vinyl at the end of this month. It's a creepy collection of tunes, even if the movie's a bit of a disaster.

Finders Keepers has, as per usual, some excellent material unearthed from some vault that they have access to. First up is Alan Parker's score for the 1983 drama *One Summer*. It's not a lot of music, all fitting on one 7-inch vinyl record, in a limited edition of 1000. It's deliciously taut and moody, sounding like it should've been released on Factory or something. The label also continues a slight trend of



releasing scores to obscure Jess Franco films (see also the label's expanded Bruno Nicolai score for *De Sade* or Private's triple LP release of *Bloody Moon*) with Jean-Bernard Raiteux's work on *Les Demons*. The work by Raiteux on this 1973 X-rated film is discomforting, but still shot through with enough grooviness to attract most fans of the psychedelic.

Speaking of groovy, discomforting, and psychedelic, Milan's release of *The Neon Demon*, by Cliff Martinez, is absolute aces in all departments. In addition to Martinez's darkly disturbing score, the album also features a new song by R&B musician Sia, entitled *Waving Goodbye*, which really ties a lot of themes from the film together. Sia's still riding high from *Salted Wound*, her contribution to the *50 Shades of Grey* soundtrack, so this should really only serve to boost the notability of yet another astonishing collection of music for a Nicolas Winding Refn film. It's out digitally and on compact disc at the end of this month, with vinyl due out early in July.

Sia also pops up on the soundtrack to a movie of a completely different stripe due out this summer. Her version of Nat King Cole's *Unforgettable* appears on the soundtrack for Disney's *Finding Dory*. It's the sole vocal cut on the soundtrack, which primarily features Thomas Newman's score, and is due out on compact disc the day the film releases. Newman previously scored the original *Finding Nemo*, along with Pixar's *Wall-E*.

You can download a new album of material from composer Wojciech Golczewski, fresh off *We Are Still Here* and *400 Days*, entitled *Reality Check*. It's available on the Data Airlines Bandcamp page, and is billed as pairing 'influences from his previous demoscene and chiptune heritage together with more recent synthwave and electronica.' It's quite good, and does a deft job of spanning the horror work of his two most recent film projects. You can currently buy it on cassette, as well as downloading it, with 'other formats' to be available from Death Waltz.

Screamworks Records continues to defy stylistic conventions with their latest release, Gerrit Wunder's orchestral score for the short film *Kiss the Devil in the Dark*. The film is a dark romantic fantasy, along the lines of Ridley Scott's *Legend*, and Wunder's score is definitely in lines with Jerry Goldsmith's

ORIGINAL MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK

KISS THE DEVIL IN THE DARK

MUSIC COMPOSED BY
GERRIT WUNDER



work for that film. If you're in the mood for something which swings easily from dark and brooding to energetically bombastic, this is for you. It's available digitally right now, and will soon be available on compact disc, along with the score for *Creatures of Whitechapel*, another short by the filmmakers behind *Kiss the Devil in the Dark*, Jonathan and Rebecca Martin.

Finally, we've been trying to get excited for this summer's *Independence Day: Resurgence*.

The summer the original *ID4* was released, we saw it in the theatres at least three times, but we can't seem to get hyped about the sequel. Despite the fact that the trailer looks good, it just seems like more of the same, and why not just watch the original? We haven't heard any of Thomas Wunder and Harald Kloster's score, but nothing they've done together

- like *White House Down* or *The Day After Tomorrow* - has even really blown our hair back, working a little too firmly in action movie tropes. However, the score to the original film, as composed by David Arnold, has really stood the test of time, and did an excellent job of making *ID4* as energetic and exciting as it was. That original film is twenty years old this year, and in September, original orchestrator Nicholas Dodd will conduct the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at Royal Albert Hall for a live orchestration with a screening of the film. Arnold will also speak beforehand about his work on the film, as well as that he's done for *Sherlock* and the London Olympics. That's a once-in-a-lifetime kind of thing, and tickets are actually fairly reasonable. If you can make it to London, you should absolutely attend.



BRAVE NEW WORDS

ED FORTUNE BRINGS
YOU THE LATEST
NEWS FROM
THE WORLD OF
GENRE LITERATURE



Novik Wins the Nebula

Naomi Novik's Nebula nomination has turned into a solid win as the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America handed her an award for her fantasy novel **Uprooted**, the tale of a girl who finds herself the unlikely companion to a dragon. This year's awards have been dominated by female authors; winners in other categories include Nnedi Okorafor novella **Binti**, and Sarah Pinsker's novelette **Our Lady of the Open Road**. Alyssa Wong won the Nebula for Best Short Story.

King Takes on Trump

Master of horror Stephen King has voiced his opposition to Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump by signing an open letter opposing the potential American president. Many of the authors involved in the campaign are creators of dystopian fiction, and it seems that a good number of authors are concerned that their dark and horrific worlds are looking more likely every day. The letter begins 'as writers, we are particularly aware of the many ways that language can be abused in the name of power.' Ouch. As yet, Trump has not responded.

Cassandra Clare to Launch New Series

Shadowhunters creator Cassandra Clare is to produce a new series focusing on the popular hero Magnus Bane. The books will be co-written with Campbell Award-winning science fiction author Wesley Chu, who is best known for the TAO series of books which deal with humans with super-powers getting caught up in an alien conspiracy. Clare said "Over the years writing the **Shadowhunters** books, Magnus Bane has emerged as one of the most fun and fascinating characters for me to bring to life. He's always had a lot of secrets - there are so many things we don't know about Magnus." Wesley Chu added, "I am so excited to contribute to the world that Cassandra Clare has created. These books and characters are iconic, and Magnus is a fan favourite. I can't wait to give them all the things they deserve. And probably a few they don't. Sorry, Magnus."

Bram Stoker Award Winners Announced

The Horror Writers Association (HWA) recently announced this year's Bram Stoker Award® winners during a ceremony held as part of StokerCon 2016 in Las Vegas, Nevada. The winners include Paul Tremblay for his novel **A Head Full of Ghosts**, John Dixon for his YA book **Devil's Pocket** and Nicole Cushing for her début book, **Mr. Suicide**.

Gemmell Awards Come to Fantasycon by the Sea

The Gemmell Awards has never been one to stay in a single place, and this year, the ceremony for the prestigious fantasy prize will take place at Scarborough's own Fantasycon by the Sea. Fantasycon is the British Fantasy Society's annual conference and has been part of the UK scene since its inception in 1972. This year's Guests of Honour are Costa Book Award-winner and STARBURST favourite Frances Hardinge and leading British horror author Adam Nevill. The Gemmell Awards are voted for by the public, and you can get involved by finding them online. The Gemmells are also the only awards we're aware of that give one of their winners an actual axe, which is rather nifty.

Physical Books Back On the Rise

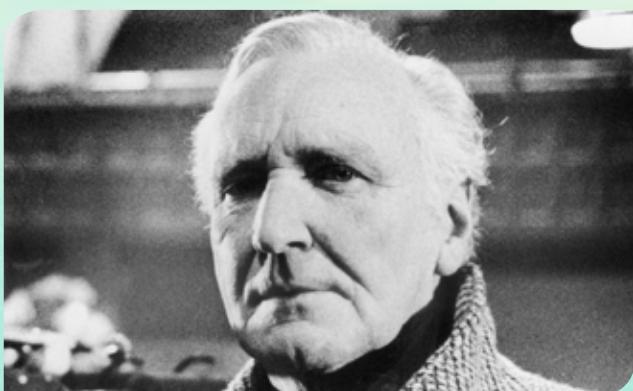
The Publishers Association has announced a growth in physical books, whilst sales of e-books and e-readers have begun to taper off. As predicted by various publishing pundits, fancy electronic gizmos are great, but the public likes the physicality of bits of finely processed dead trees covered in ink. This won't stop e-reader sellers from declaring that print is dead, but given the sheer volume of books in STARBURST Towers alone, we know this isn't true.

Camp Bestival to Feature Literature section

Camp Bestival, the festival for rich people who don't mind mud, will feature a space and science fiction literature track this year. Talks include **How to Travel to Space** with Stephen Attenborough from Virgin Galactic, **Bring Out Your Inner Alien** with Claire Freedman and **Embrace Your Inner Geek Girl** with Holly Smale. Good luck to anyone going, we'll be in bed with a good book.

Nicholas Fisk (1923 - 2016)

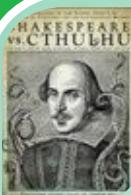
Well-loved children's science fiction author David Higginbottom, known to the world under his pseudonym Nicholas Fisk, has died. Though best known for books such as the **Stormstormers** series: **Grinny, You Remember Me, Space Hostages**, and **Trillions**, Fisk created a huge back catalogue of work and his influence on the world of sci-fi was phenomenal. He is survived by their twin daughters, Nichola and Moyra, and a son, Steven. He will be greatly missed by us all.



Catch STARBURST's own book podcast, hosted by Ed Fortune, via our website starburstmagazine.com.

ED FORTUNE
HIGHLIGHTS
NOTEWORTHY
NEW TITLES

COMING SOON



SHAKESPEARE VS. CTHULHU

AUTHOR: JONATHAN GREEN AND OTHERS
PUBLISHER: SNOWBOOKS LTD
RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 2ND

2016 has seen a nationwide celebration of all things Shakespeare, and it's inevitable that some of the homages would head into wilder, crazier territory. What if William Shakespeare, England's greatest playwright, had discovered the truth about the Great Old Ones and Cthulhu, rather than H. P. Lovecraft? It would certainly have made English GCSE classes more fun. This anthology, featuring works from the likes of James Lovegrove, Graham McNeill, Jan Siegel, Adrian Tchaikovsky and Jonathan Green, promises to be a gloriously clever collection of delightfully creepy Shakespearean stories.



NEVERNIGHT

AUTHOR: JAY KRISTOFF
PUBLISHER: HARPER VOYAGER
RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 11TH

This exciting new book from Jay Kristoff has great premise. Set in a land where three suns almost never set, a young killer trains for vengeance against those who wronged her. Mia Covere is pledged to the Red Church, the finest assassins in the land. All she needs to do is survive her induction into the cult of the Lady of Blessed Murder and she will have the tools to extract her vengeance. But first she must navigate the horror and treachery that her fellow pupils have in store for her. Apparently this will appeal to fans of Robin Hobb and George R. R. Martin. We can well believe it.



THE LAST DAYS OF NEW PARIS

AUTHOR: CHINA MIÉVILLE
PUBLISHER: DEL REY
RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 11TH

With *The Last Days of New Paris*, China Miéville wraps true historical events and people with his daring and surreal style, reconfiguring history and art into something new. Set across time, we see Paris in 1941, where an avant-garde artist finds and channels hope. But what this magic unwittingly unleashes is the power of dreams and nightmares, changing the war and the world forever, trapping the belligerents in an unending and surreal landscape. Can the heroes escape the city? Will they even try? It's going to be worth reading to find out.



GOOD MORNING, MIDNIGHT

AUTHOR: LILY BROOKS-DALTON
PUBLISHER: RANDOM HOUSE
RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 11TH

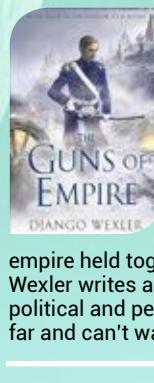
Some books just seem to beg for a nomination in either the Clarke Awards or the Kitschies. This one will probably get both. The tale of two outsiders, it follows the journey of a lonely scientist in the Arctic and an astronaut trying to return to Earth. Both these lost beings contemplate their lives and what brought them to the edge of extinction in the first place. Part science-driven survival adventure, and part book club-style navel-gazing, *Good Morning, Midnight* is pitched as a compelling tale of exploration, both of the self and of the extremes of human discovery. Sounds amazing and perfect for the end of summer to us.



THE EMPTY ONES

AUTHOR: ROBERT BROCKWAY
PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 30TH

The Unnoticeables was a weird blend of dark humour, urban fantasy, dead angels and punk rock. The sequel, *The Empty Ones*, promises to be exactly more of the same, but bigger, louder, weirder and with some calm bits so you have some time to catch your breath (though we may be fibbing about that last thing). Set all over the world, with a cast of rebellious idiots who should really know better, *The Empty Ones* should continue in the utterly odd but compelling vein of the original.



THE GUNS OF EMPIRE (THE SHADOW CAMPAIGNS)

AUTHOR: DJANGO WEXLER
PUBLISHER: ROC
RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 9TH

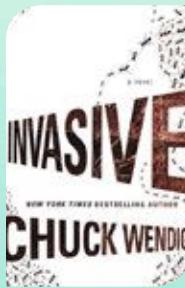
Wexler's war epic of magic, flintlock, demons and cannon fire continues in the latest instalment of *The Shadow Campaigns*. The previous book saw us stuck into divided loyalties, complex struggles and a crumbling empire held together by the sheer force of will of its queen. Wexler writes a cracking war story, and is pretty good at the political and personal cost of conflict. We've loved the series so far and can't wait to see what he does next.



BATMAN/TMNT VOLUME ONE

AUTHOR: JAMES TYNION
PUBLISHER: DC COMICS
RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 1ST

Let's be honest here, as soon as you saw this title your inner twelve-year-old made a happy Cowabunga-style sound. This is the perfect time for a cross-over; IDW's Turtles are pretty much at their peak story-wise, with everything you love about the sewer-dwelling mutants being exemplified in the new comic books. Batman is, of course, always awesome and this time he's going to team up with Leonardo and chums to take on the Foot Clan. Batman versus Shredder, you say? The IDW supervillain version of Shredder, the genuinely scary one? Who will win that fight? We predict that the fans will win this one.



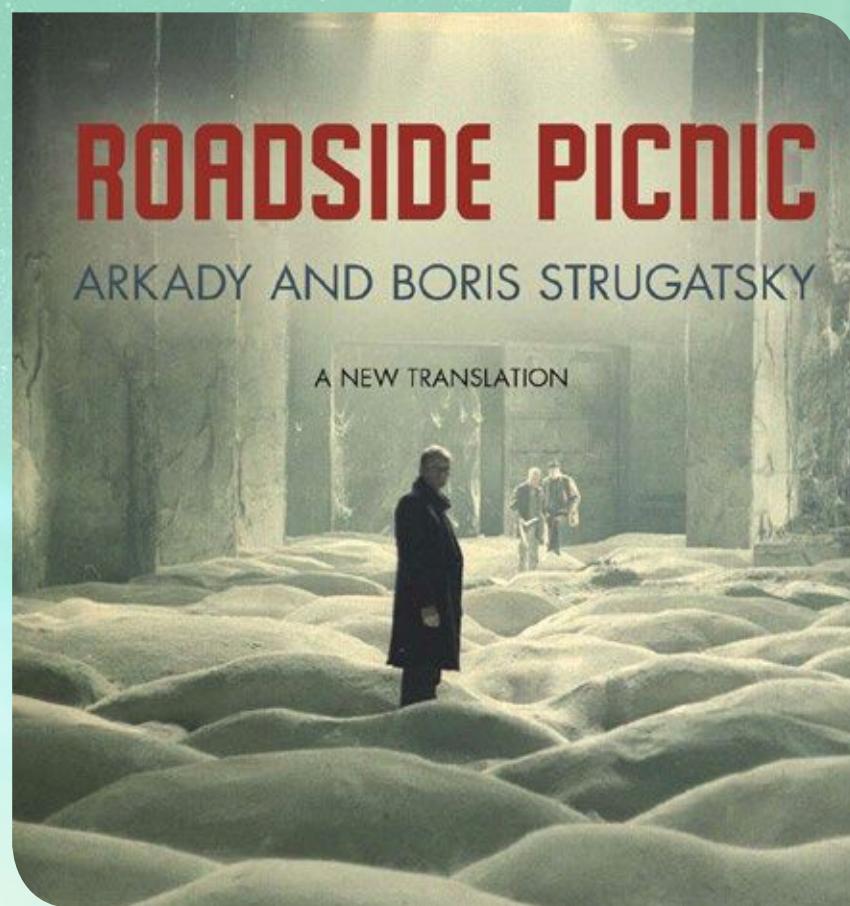
INVASIVE

AUTHOR: CHUCK WENDIG
PUBLISHER: HARPER COLLINS
RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 1ST

There are a million ways the world could end. Unfortunately for FBI agent Hannah Stander, no one could have predicted that the apocalypse would involve weaponised pre-historic creatures, brought back to life by incredibly unwise science. *Zeroes* writer Chuck Wendig promises to take us on a horror-fuelled ride into some of his own worst nightmares with his latest novel, *Invasive*. Sounds like a great mix of techno thriller and horror to us. We can't wait.

BOOK WORMHOLE

A MONTHLY PICK
OF GENRE FICTION
BY KATE FATHERS



This is not an alien invasion story...

Years after the Visit, all that's left of the brief alien presence on Earth are their landing sites, now known as the Zones. Harmont's Zone is just like any other: dangerous, full of alien tech scientists can only hope to understand, and almost completely out of bounds. But that doesn't stop the stalkers, men who venture in to the Zone to smuggle out alien artifacts for anyone who can pay. Redrick Schuhart is one of them, and is content, until his friend Kirill dies after going in to the Zone with him. Then any luck Redrick thought he had starts to run out.

That is the plot of Arkady and Boris Strugatsky's novel *Roadside Picnic* and if it doesn't intrigue you, then the novel's history sure will. *Roadside Picnic* was first published in the literary journal *Aurora* in 1972, in the middle of the Soviet Union's Brezhnev era. In 1977, it was published in English, but it took eight years and numerous arguments over content for the Soviet Union

to publish it in book form. It was successful, inspiring Andrei Tarkovsky's 1979 film *Stalker*, and yet between 1980 and 1990 subsequent editions still suffered from heavy Soviet censorship. Today, *Roadside Picnic* has spawned the S.T.A.L.K.E.R. video game series and has been published in dozens of languages, with the content its authors intended.

As interesting as the novel's history is, I mention it not just to excite you. Understanding the environment *Roadside Picnic* was written in allows us to fully appreciate the story, and adds so many layers to the text. Brezhnev's Soviet Union began as a period of economic prosperity, but quickly became known as the Era of Stagnation. The Soviet black market flourished, Soviet rock music was critical of the government, and social science fiction writing took off. We see many of these things mirrored in *Roadside Picnic*, particularly the stagnant nature of the

world Redrick inhabits and the prevalence of the black market. Only instead of American jeans, people are selling alien artifacts. There is a sense that everyone in the novel assumed that Earth's initial contact would have led to something - a revelation or a new chapter or even more alien contact - and that life has continued on largely as usual is a source of great frustration. Any technological breakthroughs are small. Any social change in the Zone cities is negative. The only ones who seem to profit are the stalkers, and they have their own problems. This is not a frightening *The War of the Worlds*-type story, or the positive, peaceful meeting of *Star Trek: First Contact*. What the Strugatskys have given us is a unique, anti-climactic vision of alien contact. Because who's to say that the Visit meant anything to the aliens? It could have been an accident - a 'roadside picnic' - a random stop on an intergalactic road trip that is only memorable to the animals disturbed by the passing car.

Because when you've been disappointed by your government time and time again, who's to say alien life would be any different?

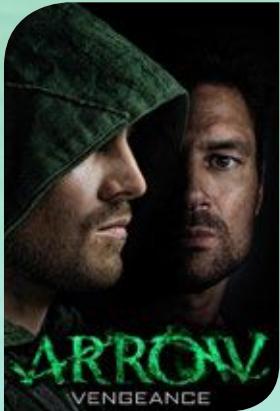
You would think, with such ideas, that the writing of the book would be fairly simple. Of course, it isn't. *Roadside Picnic* is broken up into four chapters, three of which are from the perspective of Redrick, our protagonist. His chapters are all action, trips to the Zone and run-ins with the law punctuated with small (sometimes too small) moments of family drama. Contrasting this is the single chapter seen through the eyes of Richard H. Noonan. As he isn't a stalker, Noonan's chapter is lacking in action, but in its place are long ruminations on the meaning of the Visit. Switching perspectives is an interesting choice, but I think a perfect one. Redrick's life is about the immediate: his next meal, his next job, the danger in front of his face. He doesn't have the luxury of thinking about what the Visit means when he is just trying to survive. Noonan, on the other hand, has that privilege, and that he can safely debate the Visit on a quiet afternoon highlights the problems in Redrick's life. You wish Redrick had this information. Maybe it would give him some peace.

Roadside Picnic is a fantastic example of Soviet science fiction. It's dark and exhausting and thought-provoking, and while the end is ambiguous, I adore it. Nothing is finished. Not everything is figured out. Whatever happens to Redrick, life continues, and you can only wish that it is happier.

The newest translation was published in 2012 with a foreword by Ursula K. Le Guin, and an afterward by Boris Strugatsky.

THE LATEST RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS



ARROW: VENGEANCE

AUTHOR: OSCAR BALDERRAMA, LAUREN CERTO / PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS / RELEASE DATE: JUNE 29TH

Before we get in to the nitty-gritty of this review, let us just put this out there: to us, Season 2 of The CW's Arrow was one of the very best seasons of genre TV in recent memory. So, with Arrow: Vengeance set in and around that very same time period, could Oscar Balderrama and Lauren Certo's tale live up to the high standards set by its televisual relative? Let's find out.

To put it in the most basic of terms, Vengeance looks to tell the journey of how Slade Wilson, played so masterfully by Manu Bennett in Arrow, got from the island of Lian

Yu to eventually ending up in Starling City. To fans of The CW's Emerald Archer-centric series, we pick things up at the moment Oliver Queen and Slade do battle on "the island"; the same battle that resulted in Oliver taking the eye of his BFF-turned-nemesis. From that moment on, Wilson swears to himself that he will get his revenge on Ollie, with his plan to punish Starling City's favourite son by targeting everything closest to him. That's a narrative that we've already seen play out on Arrow, but here we get to fill in the blanks of just how Slade Wilson went about his task and how the puzzle pieced together in terms of Slade turning up to torment the present-day Oliver Queen.

Make no mistake about it, this is very much Slade Wilson's story and he is indeed the star of the show, but that's not to say he's the sole focus of this tale. In addition to Wilson's journey, we also get to see the TV characters of Summer Glau's Isabel Rochev and Kevin Alejandro's Sebastian Blood fleshed out and explored. We learn how Rochev was an intern at Queen Consolidated who quickly became obsessed with Robert Queen, and then we get to see the tormented and turbulent backstory of Sebastian Blood and his ascension to becoming the ominous "Brother" Blood. Together, the threesome of Wilson, Rochev and Blood all have their joint goals of causing chaos in Starling City, yet all of them also have strong enough motives and aims of their own that help prop up the story when these facets are explored singularly or even when simply used as

supporting elements of the greater narrative.

To us, there has been no greater live-action depiction of a comic book villain than Manu Bennett's Slade Wilson, aka Deathstroke. Where Rochev and Blood were concerned, however, whilst they were delivered well enough on the small screen, it was great to see so much attention given to them here, with them both painted in new lights and given added purpose as to why they acted how they acted in TV land. For Slade, though, we see his descent into madness, the Lian Yu-discovered Mirakuru swarming his system and changing him from a loving family man to an obsessive, cold warrior who lives only for some semblance of misguided vengeance.

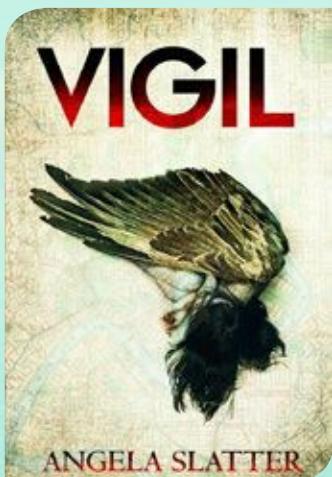
To fans of Arrow, this novel is simply a must-buy. Not only does it give you more of what you love, but it also goes above and beyond to provide far greater insight into some truly great characters, all whilst brimming full of Easter eggs and references that will put a smile on the face of longtime DC fans. It's no stretch of the imagination to say that Arrow: Vengeance could essentially serve as a whole extra season of Arrow, such is the quality, depth, and remarkably strong storytelling of Balderrama and Certo's work here.

When it comes down to it, Arrow: Vengeance unequivocally hits the bullseye.

ANDREW POLLARD



9



VIGIL

AUTHOR: ANGELA SLATTER / PUBLISHER: JO FLETCHER BOOKS / RELEASE DATE: JULY 7TH

Vigil is the first novel in the new Verity Fassbinder series by Angela Slatter and focuses on an alternative version of her own hometown of Brisbane. Angela has gained a reputation over the years as a writer of dark horror fiction, and although this is not a completely a horror story, it does contain some dark elements.

The story follows Verity Fassbinder, the daughter of a human and a Weryd, which enables her to have strength, as well as granting her the power to walk between worlds. The Weryd must remain hidden from the humans, so Verity is given the task of ensuring peace remains, whilst also ensuring the Weryd are kept secret from mankind. Through a series of events, a destructive force is seen in Brisbane, which threatens the existence of the whole world.

The story is told in the first-person, which allows the reader to explore the character of Verity and really get to understand her by the end of the novel.

Although this is the start of a new series, it also stands on its own and is a great mythical read. The story seems to cross many genres, which Angela Slatter handles very well. Whilst it is set in modern day, it does have fairy tale elements, as well as a slight horror tone. There is also a slight lean towards epic fantasy with the evil force being released.

The novel is a brilliant start to what promises to be an enjoyable series. Although it can have a slow pace at times, this is crucial for character development; Angela Slatter does not waste any pages allowing the story to breathe. Angela has set the scene for the rest of the series, by offering an original and fresh tale encompassing many genres that will enthrall all readers alike.

ANDREW MUSK



8



FALSE HEARTS

AUTHOR: LAURA LAM
PUBLISHER: MACMILLIAN
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Laura Lam has been slowly building her name up in the publishing world the last few years, but it's *False Hearts* that is likely to get her worldwide recognition. This novel fits in between the genres of a thriller and a sci-fi and is likely to be a hit within the UK.

False Hearts tells the story of Taema and Tila, conjoined twins who are eventually separated as their shared heart begins to fail. They are both given artificial hearts, enabling them to live their own lives. However, one day Tila returns covered in blood and is shortly followed by the police. She is arrested for murder and

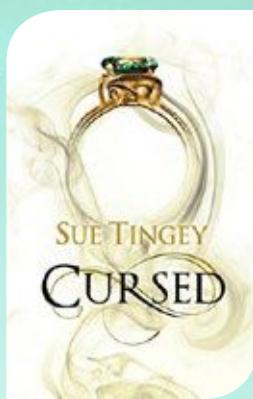
Taema is tasked with taking on Tila's identity to discover the circumstances that led to that night. Involvement with drugs is expected, leading Tila to a crime syndicate. However, secrets are shortly discovered about the twins' past, which will mean things shall never be the same again for them.

This is very much a thriller but with sci-fi elements entwined throughout the story. It is a fast-paced novel told through both twins' perspectives. The characterisation is great; the book has quite a short cast of main characters, allowing Laura Lam to explore each character in turn. The storytelling

is enthralling, with twists and turns located throughout the whole novel. One of the main elements that struck us when reading it was the originality and complexity, which adds more depth throughout.

At just over 350 pages, Laura Lam manages to deliver a short but powerful novel that will leave a lasting impression on many readers. A thought-provoking, fast-paced tale which uses characterisation to capture readers' imaginations. A truly great read from a great writer.

ANDREW MUSK



CURSED

AUTHOR: SUE TINGEY
PUBLISHER: JO FLETCHER BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Following on from *Marked*, the second instalment of the Soulseer Chronicles continues the adventures of Lucky de Salle, who went the first 25 years of her life

believing herself to be an ordinary human who just happened to be able to see ghosts, before travelling to the mystical Underlands and discovering she's actually a daemon princess and also possibly the Soulseer of legend. When her daemon sister Kayla is kidnapped by a death cult, Lucky and her entourage set out to rescue her, and along the way she begins to gradually learn precisely what being the Soulseer actually means.

With backstory and scene-setting all out of the way, this second book in the series frees the author to delve deeper into her created world, without having to worry about getting readers up to speed with its intricacies. *Cursed*, however, doesn't take advantage of this and, as it consists largely of a rescue mission plot, the series' overall development mostly stagnates. The sisterly relationship between Lucky and

Kayla, damaged by the latter's lifelong lies, was one of the most interesting things about *Marked*, and now that things had reached a point where they could figure out what they now meant to each other, Kayla's absence is felt in a frustrating rather than dramatic way, as her abduction takes her out of much of the story.

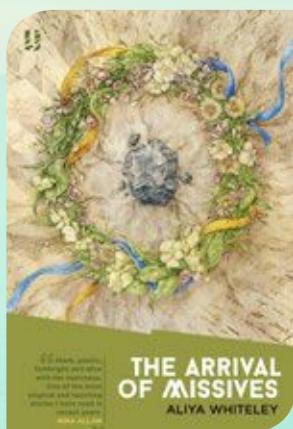
The undercurrent of romance is still there and once again avoids the pitfalls common to love triangle subplots. Rather than Lucky being unable to choose between her suitors, she simply ignores the issue due to more pressing concerns. With Jamie the angelic Guardian and Jinx the demonic Deathbringer both vying for her affections, the fact that both of them are supreme badasses yet also emotionally sensitive makes them equally appealing and means that the side you'll fall on depends whether you prefer your fantasy men to be

noble and brooding or wicked and mischievous.

Lucky's royal status again puts her in the way of power struggles between ruthless and brutal daemon lords, and reminds us of the difference between the general populace of the Underlands and the decadent sadism of its rulers. While the story allows us to accept that not all daemons are bloodthirsty psychopaths, it would have helped if we were able to get a proper feel for just how common or unusual such casual violence is supposed to be.

Now that events have calmed down a little for Lucky, hopefully book three of the Soulseer Chronicles will take us further into the Underlands, to experience the stories hidden there.

ANDREW MARSHALL



THE ARRIVAL OF MISSIVES

AUTHOR: ALIYA WHITELEY
PUBLISHER: UNSUNG STORIES
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The Great War is over and Britain is still reeling from its after-effects. Shirley Fearn, a teenage schoolgirl who lives in a small country village, believes she has a part to play in rebuilding the nation. She wants to be a teacher, giving hope and direction to Britain's fractured youth. But Shirley's ambitions are not entirely altruistic. She is infatuated with her own teacher, the mysterious Mr. Tiller, who has walked with a limp since returning from the battlefields of France and who – as local rumour has it – "isn't a real man... not after that injury."

Shirley doesn't understand what that means. Neither does she care. All Shirley wants is to love Mr. Tiller, train to be a teacher and then return to the village to work beside him. What she

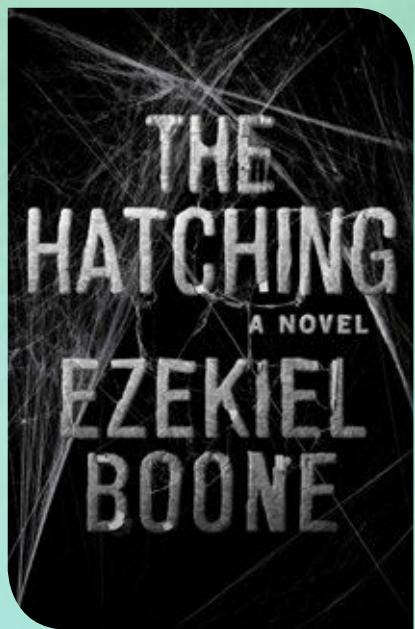
doesn't realise is that Mr. Tiller left the battlefield with something greater than his disfigurement – an object is buried deep inside him, an object that has given Mr. Tiller a prophetic insight into the future, and Shirley will soon become an important part of Mr. Tiller's mission to save the world. With the May Day celebrations fast approaching, Mr. Tiller asks something terrible of Shirley. Is Mr. Tiller mad, or does Shirley really hold the fate of mankind within her grasp?

Aliya Whiteley's novella is a confluence of social realism, rural coming-of-age story, and speculative science fiction. It only runs to 120 pages but, thanks to the poetic simplicity of Whiteley's prose, it is more intimate and more thematically textured than many novels four

times that length. Told in the first person, Shirley is a precocious narrator who isn't always easy to like, but Whiteley writes with such disarming honesty that we still have sympathy for everything Shirley feels: her frustration with country life, her fascination with Mr. Tiller, her initial ambivalence towards the blacksmith's son Daniel, which gradually becomes something more and threatens to derail Mr. Tiller's prophecy, setting a brutal and unexpected climax into motion. It is an intriguing 'what if?' of a tale, one that keeps us transfixed and wondering right up to the final pages, with an ending that won't easily be forgotten.

IAN WHITE





THE HATCHING

AUTHOR: EZEKIEL BOONE / PUBLISHER: ORION BOOKS / RELEASE DATE: JULY 5TH

Let's face it, spiders are bastards. Regardless of any old hooey we might be fed about their vital place in the ecological pecking order, they are, quite simply, nasty, beady-eyed, scuttling swine with four times as many legs as you or I and, for that reason alone, they are clearly not to be trusted. Edgy arachnophobiacs might want to give

Ezekiel Boone's brooding, If slightly pulpy, thriller a spider-swerve. Those of a sterner disposition will, however, find much to enjoy in this sprawling, cinematic romp in which humanity is, once again, under threat from little things that swarm out from under the earth and threaten Mankind's tenuous grip upon the planet.

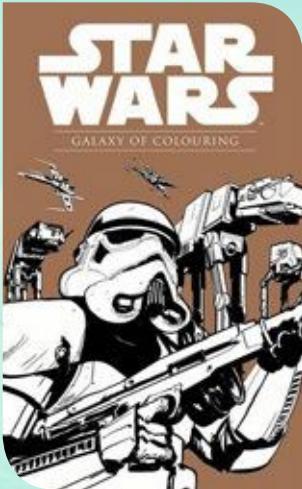
The Hatching is in many ways a throwback to 1970s and '80s horror novels, spearheaded by James Herbert's *The Rats*, in which rodents, slimy gastropods, wriggling insects and all manner of indigenous fauna rose up and decided to give humankind a good kicking. Most of these books were lurid, gory Penny Dreadfuls, throwaway holiday reading, but *The Hatching* reinvents the genre and attempts to give it a patina of respectability. It all starts with a party of American tourists coming a cropper in the Peruvian jungle, followed by unusual seismic activity in India and, most worryingly, the 'accidental' detonation of a nuclear bomb on Chinese territory. It quickly becomes clear that something very odd is going on; soon the scientific community and the American Government, led by the unlikely-named President Stephanie, are working together against a terrible, scuttling threat which has emerged from the very bowels of the Earth and which has a very unhealthy appetite for living flesh. Yikes.

The Hatching is a rattlingly entertaining read but falls some way short of greatness because of stuttering, stop-start pacing issues and a surfeit of underdeveloped or underused characters. The first seven or eight chapters fly by in a

rush of new characters – some of whom become major players in the story, some who do little more than make a quick and rather pointless cameo – and the story's momentum suffers because, whilst it deftly creates a sense of growing threat and deep foreboding, it keeps stopping to sketch in some unnecessary (and often uninteresting) character background of people we're not destined to spend a lot of time with. There are a handful of genuinely thrilling set pieces as this new breed of vicious arachnids overwhelm Delhi and a Chinese freighter and its unsuspecting eight-legged cargo crash into the port of Los Angeles – with devastating consequences – but we seem to spend a lot of time with people whose connection to the central narrative is peripheral at best. Who knows what purpose is served by the inclusion of a quartet of over-prepared survivalists in a one-horse Californian town or, worse yet, a bunch of woeful Scottish stereotypes on a remote island off the mainland?

Overabundance of characters aside, *The Hatching* is a great fun read – Boone's writing is snappy and commendably visual – which doesn't take the easy option and wrap things up neatly in its closing chapters – there's clearly a sequel being set up here. It's not exactly a literary classic but it's an enjoyable pot-boiler, a timely reminder of the blood-drenched glory days of creepy-crawlies vs. us horror fiction.

PAUL MOUNT



STAR WARS: GALAXY OF COLOURING

ARTISTS: RONAN TOULHOAT, KANTHESIS
PUBLISHER: EGMONT
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

In his foreword to the many pages of illustrations that make up *Star Wars: Galaxy of Colouring*, designer Nicolas

Beaujouan aptly explains this seemingly new trend of adult colouring books by saying, "Drawing and colouring are really healthy hobbies, and there is no conflict between adulthood and the creative reverie of childhood". In his full-page intro to the images ahead, he also sets out the tone of this nicely assembled (and surprisingly thick) book, by passionately (albeit briefly) discussing the impact of *Star Wars*, ending with "*Star Wars* is not just a dream, but a waking dream". And in this colouring book, there is certainly scope to dream.

Across over 100 pages, images from the Lucasfilm archive and illustrations by Ronan Toulhoat and Kanthesis, fill this large colouring book and give us a great deal of un-coloured characters. From Han Solo, Princess Leia, and Darth Vader to General Grievous, Devoranian, Figrin D'an and the Modal Nodes, this book boasts quite a few character diagrams for the pleasure of the avid *Star Wars* fan. It is also nice to see the level of affection that went

into a project like this, evident in both the aforementioned foreword and some images taken directly from set pieces in the films (Battle of Yavin, Battle of Hoth, the Endor Speeder Chase, and the Boonta Eve Classic Podrace).

However, some of the illustrations do come stylistically shaded to the point that, say, the odd Death Star Officer or Darth Vader comes mostly filled with deep shadow, and may not require much further colour assistance. Also, some of the prequels are less focused on than the original trilogy and, while understandable and unavoidable considering the film was not out during the book's making, you can't help but feel the absence of images from *The Force Awakens*, now that we have all seen the film. There are also some lacking names like Jango Fett (though Boba unshockingly features heavily) and the Max Rebo Band – who else among us couldn't wait to get our coloured pencils on Sy Snootles? No? Just us then...

However, these are really minor quibbles in a book that, like the *Clone Troopers* (prior to Order 66, that is), does its job well. It features mostly great illustrations, with almost a *Star City*-like graphic novel feel to a few of them, as well as others inspired by the posters of some of the films in the series (the last image in particular is taken directly from the 1977 original posters). Some may not even want to colour-in some of these pages (in these days of unspoiled *Star Wars* merch being our future pension getters) but for the majority that do, there is plenty to enjoy, with some redux images leaving open backgrounds where you can really grab yourself a sketching pencil and let your imagination go wild. Presented with a golden fold-out cover and back, this is an attractive colouring book for the more artistic of *Star Wars* fans. Just keep out of reach of the younglings...

JACK BOTTOMLEY



VIEW FROM THE WATCHTOWER

JOEL HARLEY PULLS
MONITOR DUTY
TO BRING YOU THE
LATEST FROM
THE WORLD OF
COMIC BOOKS



JOHNS • FRANK • VAN SCIVER • REIS • JIMENEZ • PRADO • SANTORELLI • ANDERSON • WRIGHT • HI-FI • ELTAEB

It's typical. You wait ages for a decent bit of news to report upon, and then when it does turn up, you spend ages debating whether to ruin it for everybody or not. Big fat juicy spoiler alerts for this month's *View from the Watchtower*, then. And how very appropriate that title has emerged to be, eh? Sorry, I did warn you, though.

We've been talking it up for ages, but

now it's finally here: DC's *Rebirth*. The 'death' of the 'New' 52 and the resurgence of the old DC Universe, married couples, goated beards, smiles and all. *Rebirth* #1 sets up the new (or old) status quo, as a mysterious figure sermonises while Wally West (the ginger one) tries to make sense of the mess he apparently caused in *Flashpoint*. Somebody or something

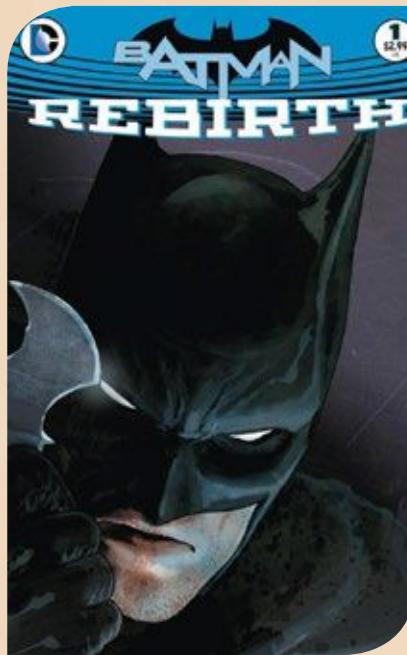
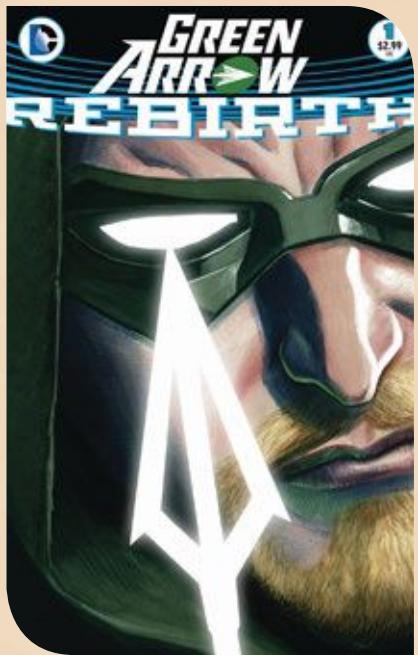
has stolen ten years from the lives of our heroes, and we visit most of them as Wally attempts to find out who. It's only the first issue, but there are some big, *big* revelations here. Seriously, go away and read *Rebirth* now.

Still here? Unlike Pandora and the New 52, that is. Burn. Among the returning faces revealed during and since are Wally West – that Barry Allen chap doing rather well, Wally gets a new outfit to showcase his ginger mane, just so you can tell them apart – and the original Doctor Fate. Everyone's been harping on about Batman and Superman's underwear (less likely to return) but, for this comics fan and diligent reporter, it's all about the face fuzz. No, not Clark Kent's dark and brooding black beard (which does look good on him, admittedly) – I refer, of course, to the golden goatee of one Green Arrow. And not just that, but his relationship with Black Canary too (sort of). *Green Arrow: Rebirth* #1 is available from all good places that sell comics, from where you should also have picked up actual *Rebirth*, instead of spoiling for yourself second-hand here.

Love is in the air throughout the New New 52. Not only has Ollie gotten his bae back (sorry), but Lois and Clark are officially a thing again, and Aquaman proposes to the missus. Will it all be downhill after the first kiss? Maybe, but it's not founded on the rubble of thousands of dead Metropolis inhabitants, either. Grim and gritty, *Rebirth* promises, is no longer a priority, cheery and optimistic being back in vogue. Batman's even smiling!

Not that he has much reason to. Having asked Darkseid's chair to reveal to him the long-standing mystery of the Joker's identity, he's confronted with not one but three Clown Princes of Crime. All, apparently, operating at the same time. That's the original Jerry Robinson 'prankster' Joker, the bit rapey Joker of Alan Moore's *The Killing Joke* and thereabouts, and the horror movie nu-Joker of Scott Snyder's *Death of the Family*. Three separate entities, we're led to believe, working in tandem. Of course, we've not seen them all in the same room together yet, so the specifics remain to be seen. Is that literally three separate men, all sharing the same looks and name? A bit of multiverse madness? Or the more straightforward multiple personalities as suggested by Grant Morrison in and around his *Arkham Asylum*? Who's to say? But one would hope, for the sake of Batman's reputation, it's the latter. World's Greatest Detective, my ass.

But not even the World's Greatest



Detective could have predicted *Rebirth*'s biggest twist so far. Who stole ten years of our heroes' lives and turned Superman miserable? No, not Zack Snyder, although he does know the dude responsible. Big blue guy. Lot of balls. Surprisingly small penis, though. That's right, Doctor Manhattan himself appears at the end of *Rebirth* #1, officially folding Alan Moore's *Watchmen* into (a) DC Universe. On that bombshell, it ends (disintegrating with it, the New DC's mysterious Pandora), cannily explaining the dark and moody aesthetic DC has been running with this past ten years. It was all Alan Moore's fault!

One dreads to think what Moore would make of DC adopting his *Watchmen* to explain away ten years of their dodgy writing and character decisions (grumpiness, most likely), retroactively cheapening a book that was never meant to be sequels or franchised, and we haven't quite come to terms with it ourselves either. Whether it works at all remains to be seen, but it's an exciting development and a genuinely fun idea. Read: actual fun, not shooting Jimmy Olsen in the head.

Who watches the *Watchmen*? Not Alan any m(o)ore, but we'll certainly be keeping an eye on things.

Worry not, True Believers, there are big developments at Marvel, too. Following the cinematic release of one *Civil War*, its comic book sequel counterpart has hit the stands. Iron Man pitted against Captain Marvel in a battle of ideologies. And, as the first one began, so it all kicks off with some bona fide bloodshed (spoilers, remember?).

Where Mark Millar's *Civil War* was relatively Earth-bound and intimate (not quite so intimate as being set at an airport, but still), this sequel goes cosmic in one of the biggest ways possible: Thanos punching a hole right through poor War Machine (aka old Rhodey). As the first issue ends, we also find the situation not

looking too good for poor She-Hulk either. *Civil War II* #1 is out now, although you've already spoiled the most important action for yourself, silly bugger.

It's been a busy few weeks for Captain America - first de-aged and back to full

strength, now at the centre of a swirling storm of controversy. The DC heroes aren't the only ones loved up - fans of Cucky/Bap (am I doing it right?) took to Twitter to hash out a campaign for Marvel to make Captain America gay with Bucky (just the cinematic versions, granted). With (spoiler) Peggy barely buried, too. Dust hardly settled from that one, it was then revealed that our Cap has been an agent of Hydra all along, *Captain America: Steve Rogers* #1 culminating with our hero uttering the famous catchphrase as the issue ends. *Captain America: Agent of Hydra*? For real? Well, he was also an old man a few months ago and dead a few years ago, so I shouldn't worry about it too much. Still, you can find out the full story in *Captain America: Steve Rogers*, which promises to tell all very soon...

Or, of course, you could just tune in here again for spoilers, just like your Nan reading up on *Corrie* or *Eastenders* instead of just watching the bastard thing herself.

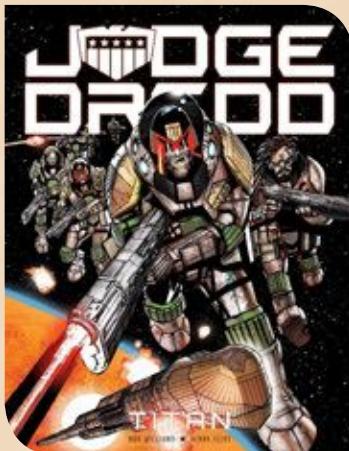
And on that series of bombshells, we wrap up this month's thoroughly eventful **View from the Watchtower**. Until next time, Hail Hydra. I mean, um, goodbye. Yeah, that's it. Definitely not the other thing. Bye!

Joel Harley can be contacted at: joel.harley@starburstmagazine.com and tweeted @joelharley



REVIEWS

THE LATEST COMIC
BOOK RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED



JUDGE DREDD: TITAN

WRITER: ROB WILLIAMS / ARTIST: HENRY FLINT / PUBLISHER: REBELLION / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The penal colony on Titan, the largest moon of Saturn, has long been a part of 2000 AD's Judge Dredd world, having first appeared back in 1977 when Dredd's criminal brother Rico finished his term and came back for

revenge. More recently, the prison played a prominent role in a run of stories written by Rob Williams, with art by Henry Flint, which are now collected in this new volume.

In the title story, Titan, Dredd is sent to the colony to deal with a breakout led by former Wally Squad judge Aimee Nixon. This is followed by Fit, a one-shot exploring Dredd's increasingly erratic behaviour as a result of injuries sustained during the Titan mission. Then there's Enceladus: New Life and Enceladus: Old Life, a sci-fi horror epic in which the escaped prisoners, having ended up on the icy moon of Enceladus and subsequently been possessed by an alien force, return to attack Mega-City One. Finally, there's Melt, a Christmas one-off only thematically linked to the rest; it's a take on classic animation *The Snowman*, except in typically brutal 2000 AD style – amusingly subversive!

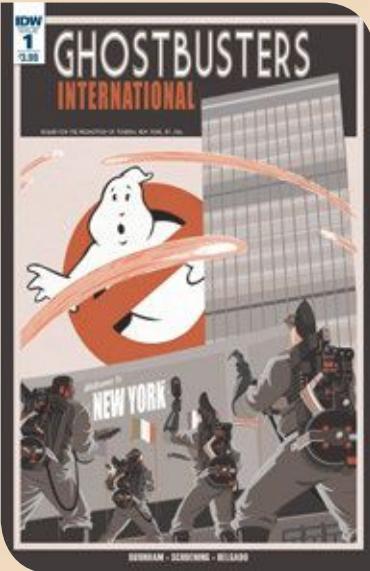
It's an exciting collection of stories, and Williams deftly brings in characters and plot threads from past Dredd strips, such as Nixon's grudge against Dirty Frank, without relying too heavily on them, making this suitable for hardened fans and new readers alike. What really sets this apart from the typical Dredd story, though, is the focus on his increasing age – the character

has been appearing in 2000 AD since 1977 and, unlike many other comic book characters, has been ageing at the same rate as the publication. Throughout this volume, younger Judges call out his age, he makes mistakes, gets seriously beaten up, and his competence is called into question – an intriguing development which hints at major changes to come for Old Stony Face.

But don't start thinking this is a *Last of the Summer Wine* comic just yet – Dredd's days as the Big Meg's toughest Judge aren't over, and Flint's artwork lends a cinematic touch to the action-packed story that plays out. There's a heart-pounding freefall sequence, a horror-inflected infiltration of the prison, and a truly epic finale as the alien force attacks – a complex action sequence handled expertly to maximum effect.

Titan is a very impressive Judge Dredd volume, a thrilling sci-fi adventure with a layer of character development that makes it an important addition to any fan's bookshelf. The question now is – how long can it be before Dredd trades in his Lawgiver and helmet for a pipe and slippers?

KIERON MOORE



GHOSBTBUSTERS INTERNATIONAL

WRITER: ERIK BURNHAM / ARTISTS: DAN SCHOENING, LUIS ANTONIO DELGADO / PUBLISHER: IDW PUBLISHING / RELEASE DATE: JUNE 30TH

When Ray Stantz goes for a tarot card reading and the death card is revealed, he is characteristically sanguine. "Death simply represents some form of change," he reasons, "and that's hardly something to be afraid of!" But, being a Ghostbuster, Ray should probably know better.

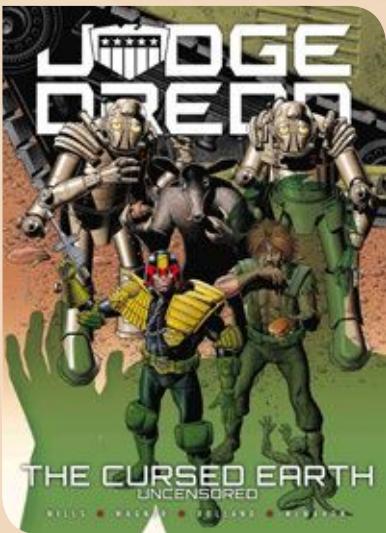
Only moments later, the team are fighting a vicious Class Six apparition in the United Nations building, while an audience of spectres scream portentous warnings. And then, when smooth-talking tycoon Erland Vinter sends the Ghostbusters to Venice (the one in Italy, not California) the boys find themselves terrifyingly out of their depth, as they try to clear a humongous assortment of vicious ghosts – including a beak-faced plague demon – from a haunted island in the Venetian lagoon. It doesn't help that Egon has had to stay back in NYC, following a nasty spectre-spitting-acid-on-his-leg incident, Janine is more over-worked than ever, and Venkman still won't take things seriously, even when a screaming apparition hurls him through a window. And worse is to come when Egon, who is reviewing the data the Ghostbusters send over to him, begins to suspect that something very sinister

might be about to happen.

For a start, fans will be pleased to know that the Ghostbusters travel very well indeed. The picturesque Venice locales make a refreshing change to the skyscrapers and hustle-bustle of NYC and the artwork, as always, is fantastic. The colours pop off the page and the detailed Italian backdrops are wonderful. There's some lovely character development in here too – Ray finally has a girlfriend (well, sort of) and the mysterious Mr. Vinter obviously has some devious tricks stored up his sleeve, while Janine is convincingly harried as she interviews some hilarious no-hoppers in a bid to find a new office help and Venkman is, as always, wise-cracking and acerbic. The dialogue sparkles, the ghouls are ghoulish, and the pace never lets up. It's good to see the comfortably familiar (for Ghostbusters devotees) New York Public Library get a name check as well. In short, this series is positioning itself very nicely to be another Ghostbusters classic.

IAN WHITE





JUDGE DREDD: THE CURSED EARTH UNCENSORED

WRITER: JOHN WAGNER / ARTIST: BRIAN BOLLAND / PUBLISHER: REBELLION / RELEASE DATE: JULY 14TH

The definitive Judge Dredd epic gets its own definitive edition. The big, sprawling mega-epic which started it all, The Cursed Earth is what we talk about when we talk about Judge Dredd epics. And now it's back, with The Cursed Earth Uncensored - bigger, longer, uncut and with added special sauce.

At last, the story's infamously banned

chapters are restored, returning Burger Wars (episodes 11-12) and Soul Food (episodes 17-18) to their rightful place in Dredd canon. Of course, given that The Cursed Earth has been getting along just fine without these pages for forty years now, it does beg the question... was it worth the wait?

Compared to The Apocalypse War, Necropolis or the more recent Day of Chaos, there's no denying that The Cursed Earth has always been something of a 'slight' story. It has its influence and its brilliance, but it is essentially just 'freak of the week' - style episodic storytelling, using The Cursed Earth as its backdrop. Which is fine. This widens Dredd's world and allows for some of the best action 2000 AD has ever seen - mutants, robot vampires, rock-eating aliens, dinosaurs and more! It's a Mad Max riff in true Dredd style. Within that context, though, Burger Wars and Soul Food are perhaps the most slight of all, adding nothing to either the narrative or Dredd lore (apart from a slap on the wrist for 2000 AD from twitchy lawyers, which no doubt curbed a few satirist inclinations in the following years).

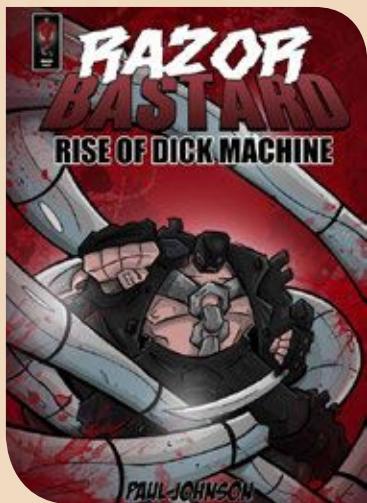
"After the war, with the government gone, there was nothing to stop the burger chains' lust for complete control. They grew more and more powerful until their hamburger war turned violent." Dredd has never really been one for subtlety, but you'll find even less of it here - with Burger Wars' antagonists being fairly accurate depictions of Ronald McDonald (Macdonald here) and The Burger King, battling it out for the monopoly on hamburgerdom. "Don't worry

folks," Ronald reassures his audience, after shooting a worker stone dead for not cleaning a table properly, "everything in Macdonald's is disposable... including the staff." It's little wonder the Burger Giants wanted the story banned, especially given the supremely suspiciously defensive nature of recent Maccies' adverts. "Nuh-uh, these are real Russell Burbank potatoes, real Canadian beef, real eggs and we totally don't shoot the staff for not wiping tables."

Next up (after a lengthy Satanus interlude), Soul Food pits Dredd, Spikes, Tweak and, um, Judge Jack against Colonel Sanders and the Jolly Green Giant. Also banned for infringement of copyright, it's a play on the Island of Doctor Moreau, with the Colonel (alright, here re-named Gribbon) standing in for the good doctor. This is the strip at its blunt silliest, but it does get Dredd fighting the Jolly Green Giant with his Killdozer, so there is that. Ho ho ho.

While both pale in comparison to the rest of The Cursed Earth's highlights, the restorations do get us four hitherto lost chapters of vintage Mike McMahon and Brian Bolland, both of whom are typically wonderful. While nothing else of vast importance is brought to the table, it does all slot in as though it had never been away in the first place - The Cursed Earth as it was meant to be. It's classic Dredd, with added classic. Insert line about 'lovin' it' here.

JOEL HARLEY



RAZOR BASTARD #2: RISE OF DICK MACHINE

WRITER & ARTIST: PAUL JOHNSON / PUBLISHER: BEAT THE DEMON COMIX / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Sometimes the title of a creative work can be so audacious it almost renders the actual content somewhat moot. Such is the case with Razor Bastard: Rise of Dick Machine; it practically dares you not to react to it.

With a title like that, it comes as little surprise that the comic is mired in the sleazy underground aesthetic of '70s grindhouse

movies and is also riddled with pop culture references from the '80s and '90s. However, unlike the regularly disappointing faux-grindhouse movies that low-budget filmmakers produce on a semi-regular basis, Razor Bastard actually retains the sense of manic fun that characterises such films, even in its more sadistic moments. While nobody reading the comic will have quite as much fun as Johnson clearly did creating it, it's still a wild and entertaining ride.

The story involves police detectives being picked off one by one, beaten to death by something akin to a War of the Worlds tripod, wielding phallic tentacles like metallic fists, but the actual plot is largely just an excuse for the genre madness such as violent cops, mad science, and black magic to run riot, all while Razor Bastard himself, a muscle-bound vigilante who looks like Bane in a gimp mask and is actually described in-comic as "the deranged love child of Jason Voorhees and Frank Castle," carves a bloody swathe through bad guys and plausibility. Backing up the eponymous lunatic is Detective Blackstone, a hybrid of Jim Gordon and Dirty Harry (and whose sorcerer brother is a low-rent Doctor Strange) with possibly unwitting secrets of his own to be developed later in the series.

Some of Razor Bastard's backstory gets revealed, and is actually quite touching in comparison to the ultraviolence of the rest of the comic; he is shown to be quite literally haunted by the ghost of the man he once was. Through its relentless carnage,

the story loses a little coherence during the minigun scattering of revelations, but in all honesty you don't buy a comic like this for the plot. The artwork is all thick lines and angles, giving it an almost abstract look, with the only true curves being the underside of frequent naked breasts, while the rich colours complement the hyper-reality of the setting.

Razor Bastard: Rise of Dick Machine is ridiculous, macho, probably highly offensive to a lot of people and is a delirious and deranged ride from start to finish that barely even pauses for breath along the way. Whether these should be taken as recommendations or disparagements is really up to the reader.

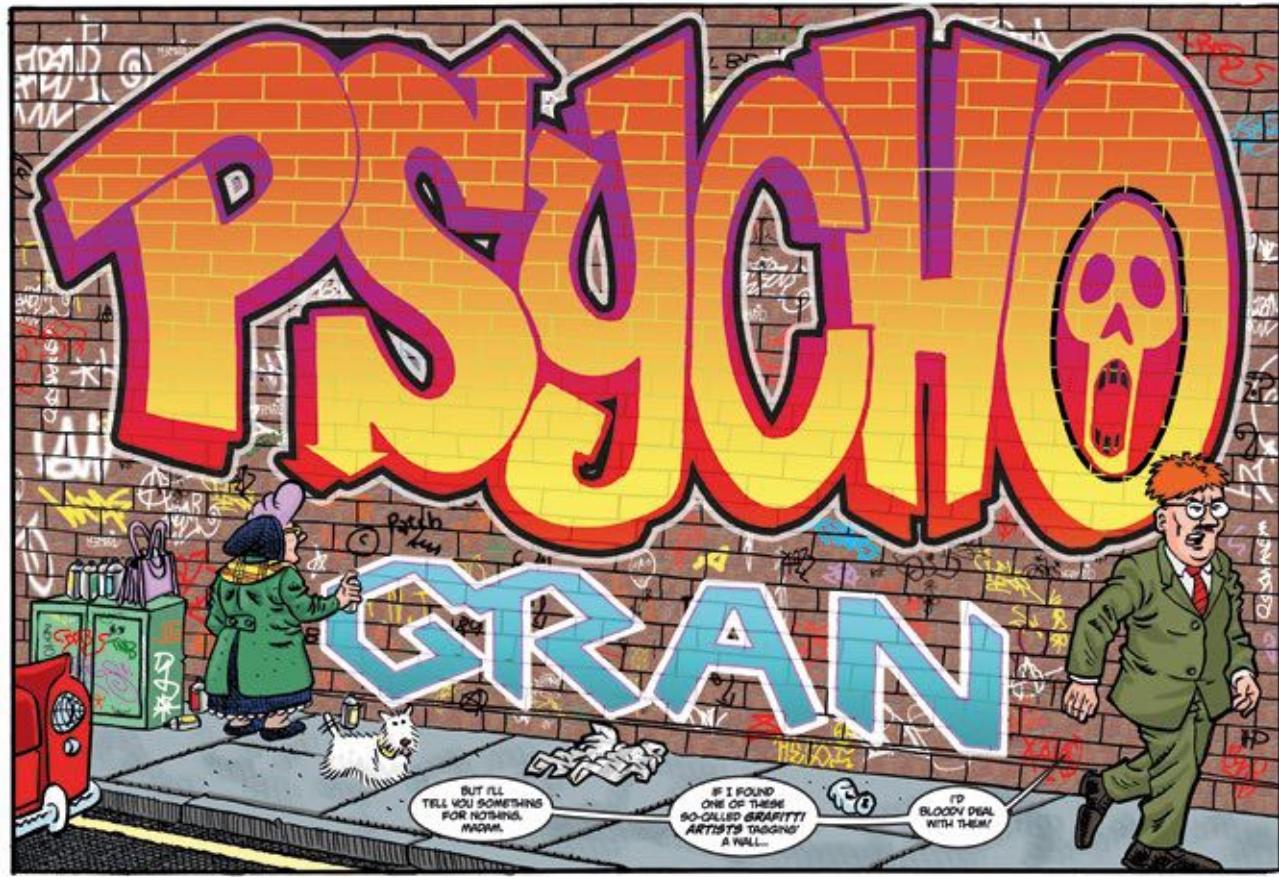
ANDREW MARSHALL



DAVID LEACH'S
**PSYCHO
GRAN**



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Studio Ghibli Animator Makiko Futaki Passes Away

Makiko Futaki, an accomplished animator who worked extensively with Studio Ghibli, has sadly passed away aged 58. Futaki started her professional career as an in-between animator at Telecom Animation Film. Her first Ghibli gig was with studio co-founder and director Isao Takahata on *Jarinko Chie* in 1981, then with Hayao Miyazaki on *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*. From that point on, she worked for the studio as a freelance key animator, lending her talents to all of Miyazaki's works, and many of Takahata's. Her final film as a key animator was *When Marnie Was There* (above).

Original Voice Behind DIGIMON ADVENTURE's Sora Dead at 51

Yūko Mizutani, the seiyu who brought *Digimon Adventure*'s Sora Takeonuchi to life, has died from breast cancer aged 51, leaving a lasting grief among otaku. From her début in 1985's *Mobile Suit Zeta Gundam*, in which she played Sarah Zabiarov, to more recent works as Ikuko Tsukino in *Pretty Guardian Sailor Moon Crystal*, Mizutani always gave stand-out performances. Yet it remains Sora, guardian of the digital world, for which she'll be most fondly remembered. Our thoughts are with her loved ones.

ERASED Anime Announced for English Dub

Such was the fervent respect, adoration and obsession surrounding last season's stand-out anime, *ERASED*, that an English dub was never in any doubt. At the recent Anime Central event, Aniplex of America confirmed that the series, based on Kei Sanbe's celebrated *Boku dake ga Inai Machi* manga, will be getting an English dub. There's yet to be any word on cast listings or international release.

KABANERI OF THE IRON FORTRESS Takes on Anime's First Credited Makeup Artist

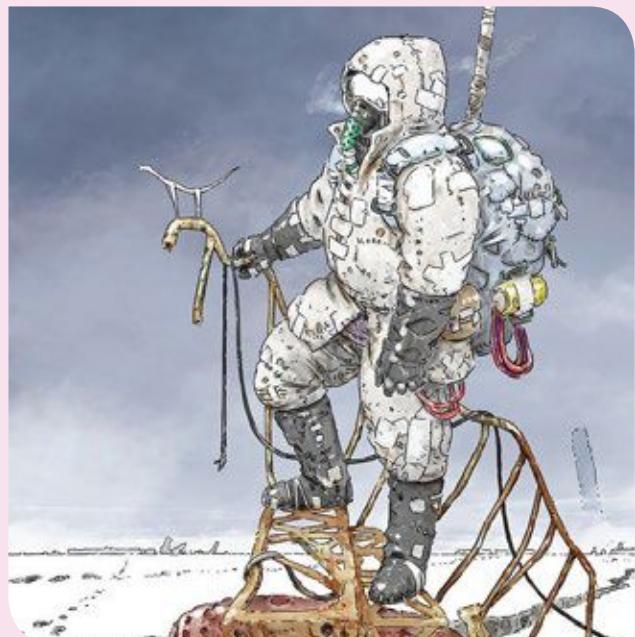
Attack on Titan's WIT Studio has set itself apart from the crowd once again with their zombie steampunk series *Kabaneri of the Iron Fortress*, but this time the difference falls in the credits rather than the content, as the team welcomes anime's first ever fully credited Chief Makeup Animator, Sachiko Matsumoto. She has previously worked on WIT's series *Hozuki no Reitetsu*, as well as Production I.G's *Guilty Crown* and *Ghost in the Shell: ARISE*, so although this isn't the only instance of such a role, it's the first time it's been recognised with such prominence.

DRAGONBALL EVOLUTION Screenwriter Offers Fans Letter of Apology

With Hollywood's *Ghost in the Shell* looming, cynics have once again turned to 2009's artistically bankrupt *Dragonball Evolution*. Critics and fans alike united against the tawdry, trashy spectacle; even series creator Akira Toriyama couldn't feign acceptance. But now, some seven years later, screenwriter Ben Ramsey has apologised to fans. Speaking to writer Derek Padula, for his new book *USA DBZ*, Ramsey said "...I take full responsibility for what was such a disappointment to so many fans. I did the best I could, but at the end of the day, I 'dropped the dragon ball.'" Ouch!

KNIGHTS OF SIDONIA Author Pens New Sci-fi One-Shot Experiment

Tsutomu Nihei, creator behind the mecha manga *Knights of Sidonia*, has again stepped into speculative sci-fi in a new one-shot *Ningyou no Kuni* (Country of the Dolls). The story started in the 23rd issue of Kodansha's Weekly Young Magazine seinen anthology, marking Nihei's first chapter for the mag in the ten years since his cyberpunk action series *BIOMEGA* moved over to Shueisha's *Ultra Jump*.



A MONTHLY
FOCUS ON
THE COSTUMED
ROLE-PLAY SCENE AT
FAN CONVENTIONS
AROUND THE WORLD

COSPLAY CATWALK



ANDY MILFORD, *another enthusiastic cosplayer, opens up on how his amazing pastime built into something more...*

STARBURST: How did you get started out with cosplaying?

Andy Milford: Funny enough, it was with a couple of friends through my Anime Society. We were headed to a cosplay club night that ran in Bristol for a few years, they needed someone to fill in a character and I thought I'd give it a go. After that, I did a few more simple cosplays at local events and it sort of snow-balled from there! Nearly ten years later, I'm still going with the hobby, having made roughly fifty-plus, with a mixture of work for me and commissions for others.

At what point did you move onto hosting and officiating the cosplay side of cons?

Previously, I'd helped out behind the desk, directing cosplayers and generally supporting where I could. The jump to officiating and judging really came about because I learnt more about my hobby and was asked by a good friend if I wanted to help her judge the cosplay contest at an

MCM Expo in Telford. At the time, I worked within the styling industry so knew a bit about fitting and fabric choices and had experience in cosplay making, so thought I'd help out and it's been a constant at events since then.

Judging is great fun, has led to some great friendships and often offers up a wealth of knowledge - certainly for the myriad of techniques you learn. I love discussing that sort of thing with cosplayers and then going home to try them out and wondering why I had never thought of it. I learn something new every time I do it!

I started hosting at a couple of small events such as the aforementioned cosplay club night in Bristol and at a convention called MinamiCon. A friend and I have a good rapport and work well on stage, so we were asked to give it a go and six years later, we're still helping out where we can with it.

Recently, I have been asked to a

couple of events as a guest cosplayer, helping to hold talks and panels for people just getting into the hobby and on subjects like photoshoot posing, fitting and tailoring cosplays, and general basics for what to wear and how to style it.

Why do you think cosplaying has become so popular?

I think the advent of the Marvel franchise and subsequent popularity of superhero movies has propelled a lot of interest in the hobby. There are a lot more people cosplaying or generally involved in the scene than there were when I first became a part of it.

The media now knows and advocates that being a 'geek' about something isn't something to be derided and often helps broach new friendships, as seen with fan events for games or movies. Online media such as weekly comic strips like *Homestuck* or series dumps like *Game of Thrones* has gotten people involved



with a wider variety of subject matter, bringing elements of fantasy and science fiction into the mainstream where it's now actively popularised.

I think access in general to older anime, manga and sci-fi/fantasy, certainly some of the stuff I watched that's being re-released now, has rekindled a love for all things geek and made it cool. Cosplay is a great way of representing that love and the more it gains popularity, the more can be added to the wealth of knowledge for cosplayers to use. The fact that it's gone from a small, very core fan base to a now much bigger and more diverse scene within the last five or six years, especially here in the UK, is testament to its popularity.

Who is your favourite character to dress as?
Tough question! I have had a LOT of fun with so many of my cosplays. I have one or two I use a fair bit but don't really have a favourite. At the moment, the one I use more frequently is Howl from Studio Ghibli's adaptation of Dianne Wynn Jones' *Howl's Moving Castle*. I love his very cool,

calm demeanour and his fashion sense! I mean, who doesn't want to be seen in a lilac and pink jacquard coat!

That said, I have had a lot of fun dressed as Sokka from *Avatar: The Last Airbender* and Mako from the follow-up series *The Legend of Korra*. These were polar opposite characters but I had a great time cosplaying with a HUGE group of *Avatar* cosplayers at a convention back in 2012. Big group cosplays, when they come together, are a magical thing and I think that's what makes one a favourite to dress in for me. If I've had a good time in it I will likely re-wear it, no matter how badly it was pulled together!

How long do you spend making the costumes and how much do you usually budget for?

This entirely depends on how long I want to spend on the cosplay and actually how long I have before a convention or show. Usually, I tend to go for simple and quick cosplays as they can be some of the most effective when they come together.

As I work full time, I don't get a great

deal of time in the evenings to sit down and just sew, so a lot of time is spent planning when I can get to work on them and which will be the easiest to complete in the time I have.

Ideally, I like to spend a good three to six months on what I'd deem a good cosplay. This would include planning, fabric sourcing and getting pattern pieces modified. I take a very methodical approach and like to have everything in place before I start. I often find patterning takes up a lot of my time as I'm a complete sucker for elaborate designs, but once everything is in place and the kinks have been worked out, then the process of making is that much easier!

Weirdly, some of my best cosplays have been ones I've knocked together in a couple of days. One, in particular, made a big impact when I wore it in 2013 for a cosplay event. My HIM cosplay from *The Powerpuff Girls* made such a splash and to this day I get asked if I'm ever going to do it again. That was put together in about four days and was great fun to wear, if a little sore on my feet after spending six



hours in four-inch heels!

Budget has always been a bit of a bugbear for me as I've never earned a great deal, but have always made sure that I have a set cost in mind, certainly on larger cosplays. It makes me stay grounded so I can hunt for the right priced fabric. I'm a firm believer that if a cosplay is going to come together, it does so at the right time, and so spending time saving and doing research can pay off in the long run - certainly where my poor wallet is concerned! I think to date my most expensive cosplay has been Luscinia Häfez from **Last Exile: Fam of the Silver Wing** at just under £250, which was roughly spread out over the course of six months.

Do you have any future cosplaying plans?
LOADS! Right now I'm working on a few for an upcoming convention in July which I'm making roughly four new cosplays for, which are: Nathan Drake from **Uncharted 2**, Bill Cipher from **Gravity Falls**, Link from the new **Legend of Zelda** that's coming to the Wii U next year and Trance Kuja from **Final Fantasy IX**.

The last is one that has been on my Cosplay Bucket List for a very long time!

I think the list of cosplays I have is inexhaustive, but I have an idea of which will get made and which are just placeholders!

If anyone fancies seeing what I'm up to, they can take a nose at my Cosplayisland profile (neomogorx) or like and add my Facebook page **Kurostylr Cosplays**.

MARTIN UNSWORTH

READER'S COSPLAY "GINGERSNAP COSPLAY"



Leia Stevens, better known on the scene as Gingersnap Cosplay, shared some of her passion with us...

STARBURST: How long have you been cosplaying?

Leia Stevens: I have been cosplaying since I was fourteenth-ish. Over sixteen years ago!

What is your favourite character to dress as?

My first costumes were from **Star Trek** and **Lara Croft** of **Tomb Raider** fame. They were store bought and then altered and developed from there. My favourite character is **Wonder Woman**; I have made several incarnations



and am working on an armoured version at the moment. I love the way in which she can be feminine yet powerful.

How long do you normally spend making the costumes?

Costumes vary in the development. From idea to wearing, it can take up to 100 hours or more. Things like the curtain dress Giselle wears in **Enchanted** took thirteen hours total. Working full time it's hard to get a chance to sit down and dedicate to it!

MARTIN UNSWORTH

Find out more about Leia at facebook.com/Gingersnapcosplay.



Are you a cosplayer and want to see your work featured in STARBURST? Drop us an email at cosplay@starburstmagazine.com and we'll print our favourites every month

PIXEL JUICE

NEWS AND PREVIEWS
IN GAMING
BY LEE PRICE



PREY 2 May Not Be Dead

Those few people who may have been eagerly awaiting a sequel to *Prey*, only to be disappointed by the official cancellation of the game back in 2014, may be excited to hear that the game may not be as dead as it appeared after all.

Speculation has mounted after both the Prey2.com and Prey3.com domains received updates recently, with the webmasters of *Prey* fansite Alien Noire also claiming to have spoken to a source who stated that development may not be as cancelled as it appeared to be.

The domain update was fairly minor, however, with both sites being repointed to the *Prey 2* Facebook page, which is now hidden. However, a previous developer on the project claims that it was practically 100% completed before it was cancelled, so fans of the original game may still have some hope left.

COMING SOON



NO MAN'S SKY

PLATFORM: PS4, PC
RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 10TH

Now this is looking interesting. No Man's Sky is an adventure survival game where your main aim is to survive and map an uncharted universe. The real attraction is that each universe will be different for each player thanks to procedurally generated maps. This makes the game almost feel like an updated version of the classic Elite in some respects. Hopefully, it will have the same ability to pull people into its world as well, because if it does we may well have a classic on our hands here.

COMING SOON



BATMAN: RETURN TO ARKHAM

PLATFORM: PS4, XBOX ONE
RELEASE DATE: JULY 29TH

*We live in the age of the remaster with the PS4 and Xbox One, as studios seem determined not to come out with original product, instead choosing to make their old games look prettier in the hopes that people will buy them. *Return to Arkham* includes *Arkham Asylum* and *Arkham City*, which are certainly both great games and do look amazing with the remaster treatment. Whether that's enough reason for players to buy them all over again is an entirely different matter.*

Possible Movement at Microsoft

With all of this recent talk about the PlayStation 4.5 and the upcoming Sony VR, it is almost easy to forget that Microsoft is still very much in this console race. With its competitor apparently making such bold moves, the company need to come up with something equally exciting and intriguing in order to ensure they keep the pace. The rumour mill has been churning that Microsoft is on the verge of some big announcements very soon.

What are those announcements, you may ask? Well if the rumours are to be believed, it is that Microsoft is planning the release of an updated version of its Xbox One and is set to reveal plans for VR at E3 2016.

How revolutionary.

There has been no official comment from the Microsoft camp, but the appearance of an Xbox One Virtual Reality feature for E3 on the official website suggests that at least one half of these rumours are true. The Xbox 1.5 would likely be built to support such plans.

Kojima to Keep Things Small

We haven't heard much from Hideo Kojima since he announced that his first game free of the clutches of Konami would be released first on the PS4, which we assume means he has been busy working on design and development.

However, he did come out this month to say that he wanted to keep his studio fairly lean, totalling at less than a hundred members. This is intended to prevent the design and development processes from becoming too bloated, which is certainly something that many gamers have had problems with, especially in regards to some of the *Metal Gear Solid* games.

He claimed that the *Metal Gear Solid* development teams would often balloon above 200 people at peak times, which he believes is far too many for him to manage. He hopes that by keeping things smaller, developers will be linked more efficiently, creating a streamlined development process that should be reflected in the games they create.

MASS EFFECT: ANDROMEDA Release Delayed

BioWare has confirmed that the latest in the *Mass Effect* franchise is to be delayed until 2017, meaning that gamers are going to have to wait just a little bit longer to get a fix of pure sci-fi gaming action.

The delay is apparently because the developers want to explore just how far they can take the game, which is always promising. Here's hoping this is as good as it has the potential to be when it finally reaches shelves.

COMING SOON



WORLD OF WARCRAFT: LEGION

PLATFORM: PC, MAC

RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 30TH

The MMORPG that just will not die is set to enjoy its sixth expansion, which is sure to draw back players who may have found that they were becoming a bit disenchanted with the game. It will raise the level cap to 110, while also introducing artefact weapons for each character type. Perhaps most exciting for players is going to be the introduction of the Demon Hunter hero class. With a few more dungeons and multiplayer raids thrown in, you can look for this to sell a ton.

COMING SOON



DEUS EX: MANKIND DIVIDED

PLATFORM: PC, PS4, XBOX ONE

RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 23RD

Human Revolution was a serious return to form for the *Deus Ex* series, but we have had to wait an awfully long time for the follow-up. Players take control of Adam Jensen again as the world has descended almost into civil war between augmented humans and those who don't have the technology. *Eidos* is promising that players will have even more choice than ever before and, critically, that the game can be completed without ever firing a shot. This is a major release and should be high on the lists of gamers everywhere.

UNCHARTED 4 Breaks Sales Records

We'd hazard a guess that most gamers reading this have already bought, and probably finished, Naughty Dog's latest game. *Uncharted 4* built anticipation to a fever pitch before release and this has paid off with it becoming the fastest-selling first-person game to be released for the PS4 thus far.

The game racked up an astonishing 2.7 million in sales within the first week of its release, with the game receiving rave reviews to go along with the sales figures.

A post on the PlayStation blog commented: "A huge congratulations goes out to Naughty Dog for an incredible feat. The success of the game is a testament to the calibre of the team at Naughty Dog and their unwavering commitment to their fans. Most of all, we wanted to give a special thank you to all of you who joined us so far on this incredible adventure, and have embarked with us on Nathan Drake's final, wild ride."

No WITCHER 4?

The Witcher 3 was an early contender for best game of the current generation and represents CD Projekt Red bringing the series to full potential after a couple of decent previous efforts.

Naturally, you would think that a sequel would be on the way sooner rather than later, but that may not be the case, according to the developer. Though they put the all-important 'Never Say Never' clause in front of it, the studio claims that the upcoming *Blood and Wine* expansion will be it for *The Witcher 3*, at the very least, with the studio adding: "We don't have anything planned as of now to be honest on the next *Witcher*."

It will be interesting to see where the studio goes from here then, with many likely to be intrigued about what they can come up with now that they are looking to explore beyond the franchise that made them famous.

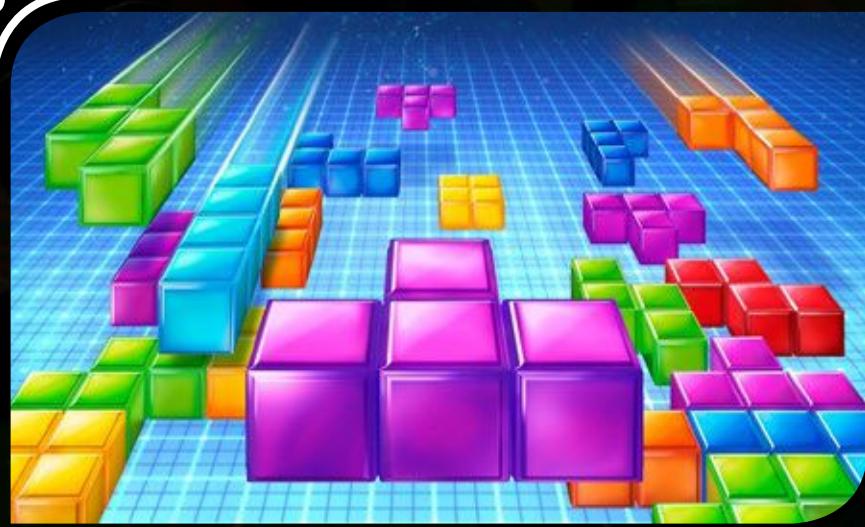
Disney No Longer Infinite

Disney has announced that they will be shutting down their *Infinity* line of games and toys, in addition to closing down Avalanche Studios, which will have a direct impact on the 300 people working there.

It is never good to see a studio closed, but maybe the cancellation of *Disney Infinity* suggests that the market for toy-based video gaming is approaching saturation. Whether this is a good or a bad thing depends on your view on spending money on toys just to play more of a game.

Regardless, there are sure to be many disappointed youngsters out there, plus it feels like Disney never really made full use of the platform, given their ownership of the Marvel and *Star Wars* characters. The problem, on Disney's end, was that the critical acclaim the game received was much higher than the sales. It all comes down to the money at the end of the day, and Disney weren't making enough from *Infinity*.

The *Finding Dory* playset that will be released in June will be the last for the game.



TETRIS Movie to Start Shooting

The **Tetris** movie that has long been rumoured is now believed to have secured funding and will start shooting as a co-production in China and the United States, starring both Chinese and Western actors in the process. Startlingly, the film is purported to have an \$80 million budget.

It is hard to see what sort of plot could be built out of **Tetris**, which is hardly a gaming series that can claim to have an extensive mythology behind it, barring the fact that it is a superb puzzler. Perhaps it will focus on the difficulties the construction industry faces because of building blocks disappearing on them all the time? Even more astonishingly, the film is intended to be the first in a trilogy, which just boggles the mind.

How is this even a thing, never mind a thing that has an \$80 million budget attached to it?

RESIDENT EVIL 7 to be Announced

We all knew **Resident Evil 7** was in the pipeline, as Capcom hasn't been shy about their intentions to bring the series back to its horror roots after the very mixed receptions that **Resi 5** and **6** have received. However, no official announcement has been made yet.

That's likely to change at the upcoming E3 2016, with a Japanese analyst claiming that the company is likely to make their announcement there and that the series will indeed see a return to its survival horror roots, acting as something of a clean slate for the company.

For our part, as long as it plays more like the excellent **Revelations** games and less like **Resi 6**, we will likely be happy.

COMING SOON



ATTACK ON TITAN: WINGS OF FREEDOM

PLATFORM: PS4, PS VITA, PS3, XBOX ONE, PC

RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 26TH

*Based on the manga and anime by Hajime Isayama, **A.O.T: Wings of Freedom**, as it will be known in the UK, will retell the key moments from the first season of the anime series and will feature the player fighting a hell of a lot of enemies. Not a whole lot more is known at this point, likely making this one for the fans. It has enjoyed a solid reception in its native Japan, even outselling **Street Fighter V** upon release, so that suggests that there is a fair bit of quality here.*

COMING SOON



KING OF FIGHTERS XIV

PLATFORM: PS4

RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 26TH

*With so much attention being lavished on **Street Fighter V**, it is easy to forget that SNK is still releasing new iterations of the superb **King of Fighters** series, which offers a serious alternative to those who have tired of the adventures of Ryu and company. The game includes 16 teams and each has three characters; a number of combat mechanics make a return, in addition to the 'Just Defend' mode from **Garou: Mark of the Wolves**. This should be a fast and frenetic fighter for players who need a new fix.*

Nintendo and Movies

Nintendo had already made mention of changing their business plan somewhat to focus on other forms of media and now it looks like we have official confirmation that they will be entering the movie business within the next five years.

An interview with Nintendo CEO Tatsumi Kimishima led to the revelation, with Kimishima stating the first movie would be released at some point within that five-year timeframe. There's no further word on what that film will be, but it will be interesting to see if Nintendo has more luck translating its own properties to the silver screen, rather than leaving them in the hands of others.

CIVILIZATION 6 Confirmed

The **Civilization** series has always been a great way to spend a few lifetimes, so it is great news that a sixth in the long-running series has been announced.

2K and Firaxis Games state that it will be coming to PCs later in the year and that expansive cities and active research tools are going to be included. Look for this to be an absolute time-sink, as all of the **Civilization** games are, when it is released.

THE LATEST
GAMING RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS



UNCHARTED 4: A THIEF'S END

DEVELOPER: NAUGHTY DOG / PUBLISHER: SONY INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT / PLATFORM: PS4 / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

As sad as it is to see a beloved franchise draw to a close, there's always something thrilling about watching it go out with a bang. This seemed to have been on Naughty Dog's mind whilst making Uncharted 4, as they pulled out all the stops to make this the best game of the saga.

The story spans Nathan Drake's life, linking back to his early years at an orphanage and performing crimes alongside his brother. Loosely tying into the series chronology, it sees Drake's past coming back to haunt him before setting out on a final quest to help settle an old debt.

Those who played previous Uncharted games will know what to expect—Nathan snarks while being shot at, climbs up collapsing buildings and fights the scenery-chewing bad guy. While clichéd, it's a formula which has served the series well, allowing it to have a playful sense of fun in comparison to the dourer big budget franchises of recent generations. The fact it can so easily switch gears between genuine fun and drama speaks volumes of the direction here, as do the near-seamless shifts between cut scenes and gameplay. Where The Order: 1886 failed miserably, Uncharted 4 succeeds in blending the two

near perfectly, switching between them with few to no breaks or loading times.

The climbing and combat mechanics remain as superlative as ever; slickly animated and precise, with no end of environmental surprises. The opening fist fights alone are worth replaying time and time again just to see what combat animation you might discover next time, and the creativity only builds as the game hits its stride. Really, between its rapid pacing and carefully disguised environmental limitations, just about anything could come out of left field at any moment, keeping you on your toes.

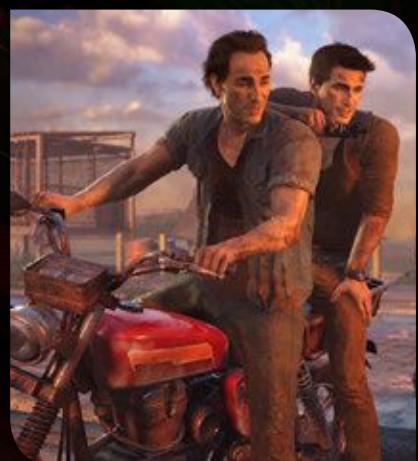
The few definite faults present in the game are unfortunately old staples by this point. The gunplay is unfortunately subpar, and almost any area where you're required to blaze through foes lacks the sheer fun present in the rest of the game. A problem, to be sure, as the final act of the game consists of almost nothing but pitched battles against a veritable tide of foes. The earlier areas do try to make up for this with less mandatory battles and brawls, but even then you can find yourself brought to a screeching halt by some truly infuriating puzzles.

Overall, Uncharted 4 sticks to what

it knows best and improves upon the series' best qualities. With a better story, smoother animations and a true sense of closure to the franchise, there's no denying Naughty Dog has closed this chapter with all the fanfare it deserved.

CALLUM SHEPHERD

★★★★★ 8





DOOM

DEVELOPER: ID SOFTWARE / PUBLISHER: BETHESDA SOFTWORKS / PLATFORM: PC, XBOX ONE, PS4 / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Some games offer high quality pathos, drama and complex character dynamics. Others offer you the chance to beat hellspawn to death with their own arms. Guess which one this is.

Doom really is Doom here, offering nothing but non-stop brutal violence. It doesn't just dodge the trappings of a complex story, it openly thumbs its nose at the very idea of it, going out of its way to mock such ideas. Not only do you leap right in - skipping any opening cut-scene - and gun down three nearby mooks, but the protagonist actively avoids the serious story going on in the background; going so far as to cut off the mandatory radio support team and smash supposedly vital items.

Oddly enough such a sheer brazen refusal to take anything seriously makes it all the more refreshing, sharply contrasting with the efforts of modern shooters to justify their conflicts. You have a gun and you want to use it, that's that. Better yet, the gunplay is some of the best seen in the last fifteen years. A big part of its success is Doom's sheer willingness to embrace audacity whilst shooting reality twice in the head and shoving its body into the gutter. Many of the guns are downright broken, insanely so, with enough demented upgrades to make Resistance: Fall of Man's arsenal look comparatively tame.

While most weapons fall into the usual pistol, shogun, assault rifle, sci-fi killy-thing categories, each can be given bonuses no sane man would ever conceive. So, you can give the assault

rifle micro-missiles for bonus firepower, but completing just a couple of challenge upgrades means you can effectively replace your standard ammo with these. Combine that with some rather loose physics, and you can sprint/leap about at a pace which would put Olympic athletes to tears whilst churning out enough missiles to level an entire apartment complex. In fact, the game encourages you to do just that. Combined with the constant scoring system, those rewards mean you're pushed to reach new heights of violence. The entire game really is tailored to encourage players to get into the absolute thick of things, with everything from lifting Space Marine's health-restoring melee kills to secret equipment hidden behind enemy spawn points; it really seems as if id Software pulled out all the stops to turn this into a massive rollercoaster ride of gore, gibs and bullets.

Unfortunately, much like a rollercoaster, once you're done there's sadly little reason to go back. Across the campaign, you'll have seen damn near everything across its vast sprawling levels, and as fun as they are, there's little in the way of staying power. As bright and fun as the campaign is, it burns out a little too quickly, and even a few of its gory gimmicks start to feel tedious before the end. A big part of this is due to the predictability of certain objectives (such as stealing dead men's arms to fool palm-print locks) and the sheer lack of variety when it comes to Mars' aesthetics. It's hardly badly designed,

and the sprawling level variety does help to initially disguise its limitations, but before long, its one look overstay its welcome. You see a lot of red, a lot of burning lava, and a lot of drab gunmetal, and by the seventh hour your eyes will be crying for some blue or green to contrast with all that orange.

In addition, outside of the campaign there's sadly not much to write home about. If you've played Quake III, you'll quickly start to get that creeping feeling of mechanical *déjà vu* as you wade into battle. You know the one, where a game lifts so many ideas of a popular title without quite nailing them, resulting in an oddly off-kilter experience. While it might be competently produced, the surprisingly sluggish rockets, odd placement of power-ups and odd choices to mash in Halo-inspired ideas results in a mode with identity crisis, not knowing whether to fully embrace classic frag-happy combat or more modern trends. At best, you might get a couple of hours' fun before just going back to your usual FPS of choice.

Doom is fun but short-lived. If you want a solid fifteen hours of excitement and love hacking through mobs, you couldn't ask for anything better. Really, it's some of the most fun you'll have this year, but those leaning towards a solid multiplayer experience or replay value may want to look elsewhere.

CALLUM SHEPARD





OVERWATCH

DEVELOPER & PUBLISHER: BLIZZARD ENTERTAINMENT / PLATFORM: PC, XBOX ONE, PS4 / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Riding the wave of hype right up to its release date, Blizzard's Pixar-esque version of Team Fortress 2 finally exploded out of beta in a full release. After heavy marketing, multiple short films and heavy promotion via popular streamers, Blizzard was clearly confident they had a winner on their hands with this one, and they were entirely right.

The story here revolves around a small band of heroes and villains associated with the now defunct Overwatch organisation. Despite having disbanded years ago, shadowy figures have begun to take interest in the former agents and anarchy reigns across large

chunks of the world. This is effectively all you need to know and all the game gives you, with extra lore set to be built upon via supplementary material. While usually this would be a black mark against such a game, the colourful variety of characters, background information and minor details found within levels does enough to bring the world to life and keep you invested.

Overwatch's innate strength stems from the sheer variety of characters on offer. While divided up into the tried and true mix of offensive, tanking, supporting and defensive classes, no single hero is alike, with unique mechanics tailored

to just about any play style. This is a game which features a Japanese Bowman who can fire around corners, a mini-mecha piloted by an e-sports pro-gamer and a time-displaced cockney woman after all, and each is remarkably well balanced against another. The second you die to one frustrating hero who can repeatedly wipe the floor with your character, you can instantly switch out for someone with an innate edge against them. While it avoids devolving into a total rock-paper-scissors affair, there are enough soft counters or useful abilities to always give you an edge if you're on your toes. What's more, the limited weapon variety per hero hardly hurts the game, as you're switching between them so often it barely registers.

When it comes to failings, there's remarkably little to actually talk about. The closest things there might be to genuine failings is that certain levels are weighted in favour of defensive or turret heavy classes, or that the lack of match variety might hurt its longevity overall. Beyond that though, there really is very little to criticise or truly drag down your experience.

As much as the hype might inspire cynicism in many readers, Overwatch really is well worth a look as area-based shooters go. Any fan of FPS combat looking for something to put a new spin on things would do well to grab this one at the earliest opportunity.

CALLUM SHEPARD

★★★★★ 10



COFFIN DODGERS

DEVELOPER & PUBLISHER: MILKY TEA STUDIOS / PLATFORMS: PC, OS X, PS4, XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE: JULY 8TH

We live in a time of gaming typified by a distinct lack of second controllers. Internet gaming, DLC, massive connectivity, cinematic storytelling and gorgeous graphics, for sure, but two player, sitting-in-the-same-room, split-screen gaming feels like a thing of the past. Exit player two (unless you buy a second

controller or plump for a better console package, admittedly). Enter Coffin Dodgers, which, like its geriatric heroes, feels like a ruddy-cheeked throwback to the good old days. Mario Kart, Street Racer, and Crash Team Racing; all titles that they just don't seem to make for PlayStation or Xbox these days, a type of gaming that barely seems to exist anymore.

Here we have a selection of lively grannies and granddads, challenging the Grim Reaper (actually Death himself) to a series of mobility scooter races around their retirement village. Like Street Racer, you can twat away your fellow racers and opponents with your cane – and like Mario Kart (the game's strongest influence) you can pick up power-ups (machine guns, bombs and oil slicks, oh my) to help your cause or hamper others'. Outside of that, upgrades can be bought and installed to give your scooter the winning edge. Not that you'll really need to: Coffin Dodgers is embarrassingly easy at times.

A range of modes help disguise the fact that there's little variety to the game. It boasts a single player campaign, online multiplayer (and old-fashioned split screen, if you happen to be rich enough to own a second controller) and free-roaming (a series of Crazy Taxi or Die Hard with a Vengeance-type search

& collect missions ruined by a useless navigation system). All are decent enough, but get old very fast. Between this, the infuriatingly repetitive music and PS2 (or even really good PS1) level graphics, one would imagine Coffin Dodgers ready for the grave already.

And yet! Between its silly story and staggeringly cheap looking visuals, it's undeniably a lot of fun, roaring around colourful streets and zipping through subterranean race tracks. Simple gameplay mechanics make it easy to pick up and play; a good one to dip in and out of in-between more substantial gaming sessions, then. Coffin Dodgers is undeniably a generation or two behind, and it's certainly a little on the dodgy side – but don't write it off just yet. There's life in this old dog.

JOEL HARLEY

★★★★★ 7

RETRO BYTES

A LOOK BACK AT
THE WORLD OF
RETRO GAMING
WITH SPECIAL GUEST
SEAN ONLY



TOTALLY NINJA

The *Shinobi* franchise dates all the way back to 1987 and is one of Sega's longest-running and most successful game series. The boom period of ninja games during the late 1980s can be almost exclusively attributed to the success of *Shinobi* - the lead character was even briefly used as a mascot for Sega during this time. Today we will be looking at the first wave of *Shinobi* games all the way to the end of the 16-bit era.

Released to arcades in 1987, Sega's eponymous 'hack and slash' platformer became the inaugural entry into the franchise. On a mission to rescue an alarming number of his students from various types of terrorists, players take control of Joe Musashi - a ninja with an incredible ability to store a seemingly infinite amount of throwing stars in his grey leggings. Joe must progress through five missions of increasing difficulty to ultimately take down the Zeed clan.

Boasting some of the tightest controls and smoothest gameplay seen at the time, *Shinobi* was a huge hit in arcades and was ported to almost every home system of the

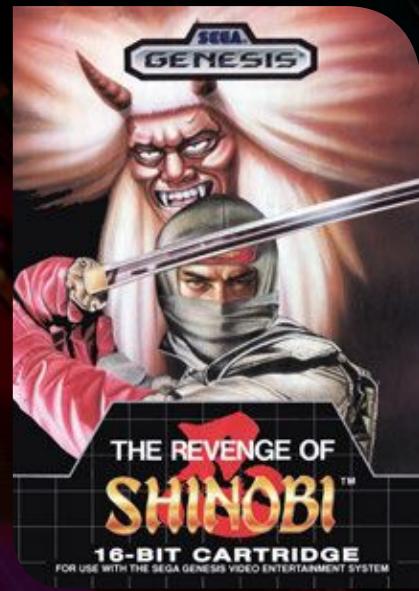
era. Designed to show exactly what Sega was capable of graphically, the game was a technological triumph. Obviously, this meant that many of the home ports had to be scaled down considerably, but the simple yet distinctive gameplay meant that the majority of these ports did not really suffer and were still ultimately well received.

Vibrant graphics, a typically excellent soundtrack from Sega, and a memorable and easily recognisable protagonist really made the game stand out, but it was the game's notoriously steep (but fair) difficulty curve which gave it legendary status. In the graphics department, the moving ninja eyes on the opening scene make *Shinobi*'s one of the most iconic title screens of all time. It seems almost unfathomable by today's standards, but these moving eyes really did blow people away. The same could be said for the faux-3D style bonus stage which was fairly innovative for that period. Players took control of Mr Musashi from a first-person perspective as he attempts to do away with the oncoming horde of angry ninjas. A perfect score in this bonus stage rewards the player with a precious extra life.

With the huge success of not only the arcade machine but the many, many home ports, it was inevitable that Sega would commission a sequel. Released exclusively to arcades in November of 1989, Sega's *Shadow Dancer* was the second entry in the *Shinobi* franchise. Despite solid reviews and a decent level of popularity, *Shadow Dancer* is often seen as the black sheep of the series. Instead of Joe Musashi, players take control of an unnamed mystery ninja and his canine companion.

As solid a game as it was, changes in development team and an effort to shift gameplay emphasis meant that it didn't quite have the feel of the previous game and left fans with the impression that it wasn't the 'true' sequel that people had been hoping for. Many felt taking the game's beloved central protagonist out of the equation was an unusual step given how popular he was, particularly at this time. Playing *Shadow Dancer* today, out of context as a stand-alone game, it holds up fairly well. The action is consistent, and being able to play as a dog adds some pretty satisfying game mechanics (as well as bringing a little variety to proceedings). It is clear, however, why fans didn't take to the game so well given how much the winning formula had been changed. Many of these fans were still holding out for what they felt was a true *Shinobi* sequel. Fortunately, they didn't have long to wait.

An exclusive release for lucky Sega Megadrive/Genesis owners in December 1989 (just over a month after *Shadow Dancer* was released to arcades), *Revenge*



of *Shinobi* took the formula laid out by the original game and improved upon almost everything. Despite being an early release in the Megadrive's lifecycle, it did an impressive job of pushing the hardware and showcasing exactly what the fledgling 16-bit technology was capable of. Graphically, *Revenge of Shinobi* impressed, but it was the soundtrack that really got people talking. Composed by Yuzo Koshiro, *ROS* not only featured some incredible tunes, but was perhaps the finest example to date of getting the most out of the Megadrive's (relatively) limited sound chips. So revered is Koshiro's *ROS* soundtrack, that it is often cited amongst the greatest video game soundtracks of all time.

Players once again take control of Joe Musashi, as the nefarious Zeed organisation from the first game have plans of revenge, retribution and alliteration and have reformed as neo-Zeed. This time, the evil buggers have not only kidnapped your missus, but brutally murdered your ninja master! Luckily, Joe has learnt a double jump and various new magic attacks to make the seemingly impossible task of taking down Zeed that little bit more possible. The difficulty curve from the first game is back with a vengeance and a combination of lightning reactions and level memorisation is required if you plan on beating this exceedingly tricky game. It's fair to say that the difficulty from the first game has been ramped up a notch or two (some of the bosses in particular can make you want to throw your controller across the room), but the satisfaction after completing a level or a particularly tricky section makes it as rewarding as it is challenging. Thankfully, those tight controls and the super-smooth addictive gameplay have also returned full force and it's for those reasons that *ROS* still stands up as one of the greatest Megadrive releases of all time.

1991 saw several ports of *Shadow Dancer* finally reach home computers and Sega's 8-bit Master System. Essentially a toned-down version of the arcade game,



these ports received favourable reviews, but it was the Megadrive/Genesis version of the game that is remembered most fondly. *Shadow Dancer: The Secret of Shinobi* (to give it its full name) was not a port, rather a stand-alone game inspired by and loosely based on the arcade cabinet.

Set in the not-too-distant future of 1997, an evil lizard-worshipping ninja cult (bizarre but true) have taken over New York, turning the city into ruins and enslaving the surviving citizens in the process. It's up to the player to take control of the heroic Shinobi ninja and his loyal dog and not only rescue the innocent citizens, but take NYC back again. The identity of this heroic ninja remains ambiguous in game but is cited as either the son of Joe Musashi or Joe himself coming out of retirement, depending on the source. This type of fan service and a far more traditional 'Shinobi-feeling' game meant that this version of *Shadow Dancer* was received much more favourably by fans of the series.

Shinobi III: Return of the Ninja Master (released in Japan as *The Super Shinobi*)

is the final game that we're going to be looking at this month and the final 16-bit entry in the *Shinobi* franchise. Also released exclusively for the Sega Megadrive/Genesis, *Shinobi III* hit stores in the summer of 1993. Originally intended to be released a full year earlier, the perfectionists at Sega decided that an almost-finished beta version of the game did not live up to the incredibly high standards set by the previous two 16-bit *Shinobi* releases and made many alterations to both gameplay and story.

Back from the dead once again, the Zeed clan is threatening world domination. Headed by a man known only as 'The Shadow Master', the villainous organisation is now stronger than ever, and the only man capable of taking down these rascallions is, you guessed it, our old pal Joe Musashi.

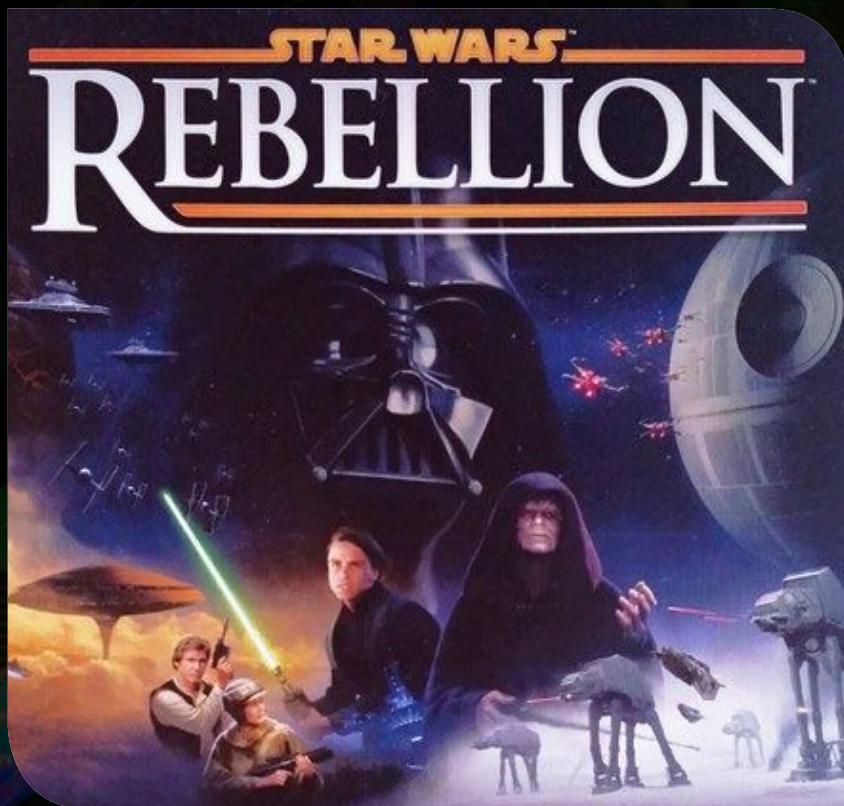
As a direct sequel of *Revenge of Shinobi*, many of the gameplay and stylistic elements from that game are still here, but with several upgrades. Noticeably smoother and quicker, more emphasis is placed on speed and fluidity as opposed to difficulty and precision. Joe's repertoire of moves has expanded significantly with the addition of new magic attacks, an air dash kick, a running slash and a Ninja Gaiden-style ability to wall jump. Many reviews heralded *Shinobi III* as a superior game to its highly revered predecessor *ROS*, although the main criticism of the game was that the difficulty was seen as a little too lenient until the 'almost impossible' final level came around. Either way, preferences aside, there's little argument to say that *Shinobi III* also stands up as not only one of the greatest Megadrive/Genesis releases but as one of the strongest action games of the entire 16-bit era.

The *Shinobi* franchise continued into the 32-bit era and beyond, experimenting with pre-rendered, digitised sprites, 3D environments and polygons, and even RPG elements in the later games. Unfortunately, we've run out of space for today, but perhaps we'll get round to looking at the rest of the series in a later issue...



ROLL FOR DAMAGE

ED FORTUNE
GUIDES YOU
THROUGH THE
REALM OF
TABLETOP GAMING



Sometime in the distant past, movie tie-in board games weren't very good. They were afterthought-style affairs, another toy to sell to the masses. These days, board games are pretty much a mainstream entertainment in their own right. These days, we expect our games to be *good*, and if they're tied into a popular franchise, they had better be *really good*. In fact, the bigger the franchise, the better the game. Or else. That goes double for all things *Star Wars*.

We've come a long way from the '70s, when all it took was something that sort of resembled *LUDO* with Darth Vader's face on it. For those of you with fond childhood memories of Kenner's *Escape from the Death Star* board game, I heartily advise you to never actually play it as an adult. It's not the game you remember.

The current keepers of the licence are Fantasy Flight Games, who have, so far, been pulling an absolute blinder with their treatment of *Star Wars*. Given that it's one of the biggest movies of all time, the fans now demand something that matches their expectations. Their range has been slowly building up, including several card games,

three different versions of a table top roleplaying game, two spaceship battles games and a skirmish/scenario-driven miniatures strategy game. All of these have been excellent examples of their kind, but one thing that has been lacking so far is the thing Fantasy Flight are loved for. Up until recently, there hasn't been a massive strategy simulation game.

Star Wars: Rebellion fills that gap. Fantasy Flight do simulations really well. They do *Star Wars* really well. So their *Star Wars* strategy sim game? It's utterly amazing. *Rebellion* attempts to simulate the major plot points of the original movie series, but in a way that focuses on the grand space opera that makes up the fun parts of the movie. It's a two player game; one side plays the Rebellion, the other the Empire. The aim of the game is simple; if you're the Rebels, you need to agitate against the Empire enough that the people rebel and take down their conquerors. If you're the Empire, you need to find the Rebel base and blow it up.

This is handled by a nifty turn mechanic, which also represents the Empire's reputation. As the Rebels, certain actions reduce the Empire's renown, which in turn shortens the number of turns in the game. And the Empire needs all the turns it can get, because the galaxy is quite a large place, especially when you're looking for one lousy little Rebel base. So the game opens with the Rebel player secretly picking their base from a stack of cards, and the Empire player trying to figure out what the Rebel scum are up to. The rest of the stack gets used as a 'probe deck'. Each turn, the bad guys will draw some cards, thus making it easier to figure out where the Rebels are.

Rebellion is a very big box, filled with lots of carefully designed pieces. First and foremost is the board, which is appropriately huge and lovingly detailed. Then come the playing pieces. The Rebels get tiny X-Wings, Y-wings, cruisers, landspeeders and those rebel troopers with the funky-looking cycling helmets. The Empire gets TIE Fighters, Stormtroopers, Star Destroyers, Super Star Destroyers



and Death Stars. Yes, that's right, Death Stars. Plural. You begin with one golf ball-shaped doom planet, and you have the option (during play) to build another. The game even helpfully provides an unfinished Death Star so you can keep track of the horror. Of course, blowing it up really helps damage the Empire's reputation, making the game easier to win for the Rebels. *If* they can blow it up, of course.

As the game progresses, the Rebels slowly build support and troops. Each player has a deck of cards that determines the sort of actions they can take, and some of these cards can't be discarded, meaning that the Rebels can always build alliances and blow things up. Meanwhile, the Empire is an unstoppable military juggernaut. The thing is, the more Star Destroyers you have, the easier it is to miss some nuance. The more you tighten your grip, the more star systems will slip through your fingers. Still, they are quite formidable. Sure, their actions are less agile, but they can use cards to build Death Stars and send out more probe droids to find the Rebel base.

These actions are dependent on the leaders you have available. New heroes come into play as the game progresses, and the two sides can oppose actions by sending in their own leaders. Let's say the Rebels want to blow up a factory on Corellia. They send in Princess Leia to do the job. The Empire sends in Grand Moff Tarkin and Darth Vader to stop her. After some swift dice rolling, not only is she stopped, but captured. Next turn, the Rebels dust off Luke and Han to rescue the Princess. And so on. The game constantly generates these thematic little scenarios that are not only packed with the atmosphere of the movies but they are also fun to play out. Luke, by the way, starts off as a bit of a rubbish leader. Until he visits Yoda. Of course, the Empire always has the option to turn Luke to the dark side. Just



because it didn't happen in the movies, doesn't mean it can't happen here.

It's a two-player game. The rules say you can split it into a four-player game by dividing up various in-game roles, but at the Secret STARBURST Thunderdome we totally ignored that rule by playing it with the normal two-player rules, but having other players 'huddle' and help work out strategy. This resulted in lots of giggling and Ewok impersonations, which is a good thing.

It's also a long game. It takes a good while to set up, even if you avoid playing with all the various pieces. We discovered it was at least a four-hour game, which for us makes it an event game; you plan to play it as a good part of your day, which is ideal if you have a spare Sunday and some *Star Wars*-themed snacks to munch through.

Like many Fantasy Flight games,

Rebellion is essentially lots of simple little ideas and rules that mesh together to form a greater whole. It's a bit daunting to begin with; after all, we're looking at a game the size of a galaxy that takes a big chunk of time to play. However, because each smaller, individual element works perfectly fine on its own, it all sinks in and becomes effortless. Let's take combat, for example. There are two 'theatres' of war: Space and Ground. You essentially add up your troops of each type, and dice off using the game's special dice. What adds complexity is the various modifiers; certain leaders can generate advantages depending on the combat. Got a big space battle coming up? Then you'd better make sure you've got Wedge Antilles working for you, because he draws loads of cards that help in X-Wing-style action.

Another example would be when the Rebels try to move their base (say, from Hoth to Yavin). It's certainly do-able in the game, and the scenario itself is fraught with peril; it's perfectly possible for the Rebel player to mess up or be unlucky, and end up flying his heroes into the Empire's trap. But the rules to do this are pretty easy and explained on the cards. Failing that, the rule books are clearly laid out and well done.

Star Wars: Rebellion is an addition to the long lineage of *Star Wars*-themed games, and demonstrates how far we've come. It's dripping with atmosphere and tension, stuffed to the gills with cool art and looks amazing. If you love strategy games and/or *Star Wars*, you've probably got this on your wish list already. This is a game you should play as soon as you can, because it's excellent fun. As always, feel free to write in and tell us about your tale of galactic conquest.

PHOTOS: MIKE SMITH

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WATTO'S EMPORIUM

STUFF WE LIKED FROM
AROUND THE WEB
THIS MONTH WITH
JACK BOTTOMLEY

WHAT YA GONNA WEAR?

There are many opinions in the neighbourhood regarding Paul Feig's upcoming **Ghostbusters** reboot, with some being optimistic, others proclaiming it the biggest travesty on earth since **The Wicker Man** (2006, obviously) and flat out refusing to see it. Whatever your opinion, though, it will be intriguing to see what strange things go on in cinemas come July. However, we can hopefully all agree that the rebirth of the merchandising madness behind this iconic '80s-born franchise will be a welcome change from the endless shelves of superhero gear. Take, for instance, this updated Electronic Proton Pack toy (we really have come a long way since Kenner's '80s Proton Pack - see our **Ghostbusters** merch feature on pages 26) from forbiddenplanet.com, which is the stuff young aspiring ghost trappers' dreams are made of.

However, for all those adults out there with a devout fondness for Ivan Reitman's classic comedy films (well there is still a level of debate around **Ghostbusters II**), who are now more inclined to call the 'busters in than pop on their own proton packs anymore, what about these cosy slip-on slippers? Available from trufflesuffle.co.uk, this pair of slippers, decorated with the instantly recognisable **Ghostbusters** logo, is perfect for those who ain't afraid of no ghosts... but also don't begrudge a little bit of comfy footwear either.

GHOSTBUSTERS 2016 ELECTRONIC PROTON PACK - £44.99
AVAILABLE FROM FORBIDDENPLANET.COM

GHOSTBUSTERS SLIP-ON SLIPPERS - £9.99
AVAILABLE FROM TRUFFLESHUFFLE.CO.UK



THESE WALLETS GO BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY

Star Trek Beyond (see pages 48) is on the horizon and what better way to turn up to screenings of the film in July, than with your money kitted out in any of these three official **Star Trek** themed wallets? All available from beltsbucklestees.com, these money safe keepers go boldly where many have gone before, but do so very well. Coming in the Enterprise crew colours of Gold, Red and Blue, these wallets will allow your hard-earned pound notes to live long and prosper... until you spend them, that is.

STAR TREK WALLETS (BLUE, RED, GOLD)
£15 EACH

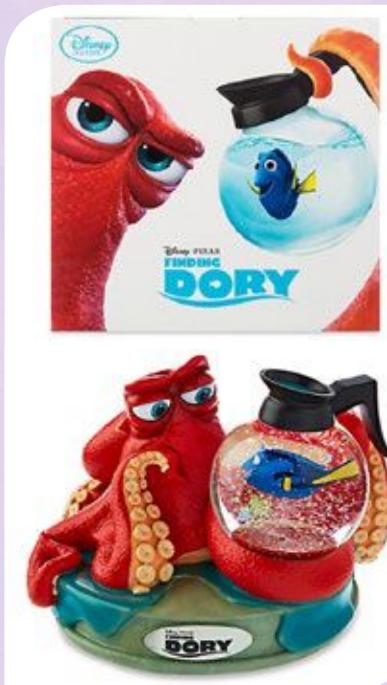
AVAILABLE FROM
BELTSBUCKLESTEES.COM



THIS SNOW GLOBE IS HUNKY DORY

After thirteen years (yes, it has been that long) of waiting, Pixar have finally returned 'somewhere, beneath the sea', as we reacquaint ourselves with Nemo, Marlin and Dory, although in **Finding Dory** (read all about it on pages 38) - as clear by the title - the story shifts from father and son clownfish to the beloved forgetful Pacific regal blue tang Dory. So, if you are a fan of Pixar's stunning deep-sea world, why not dive into disneystore.co.uk and bring a piece of the new film to your mantelpiece, with this snow globe modeled on a scene from the upcoming film with new cranky Octopus character Hank and a coffee mug-housed Dory. Water snow globe this is... sorry.

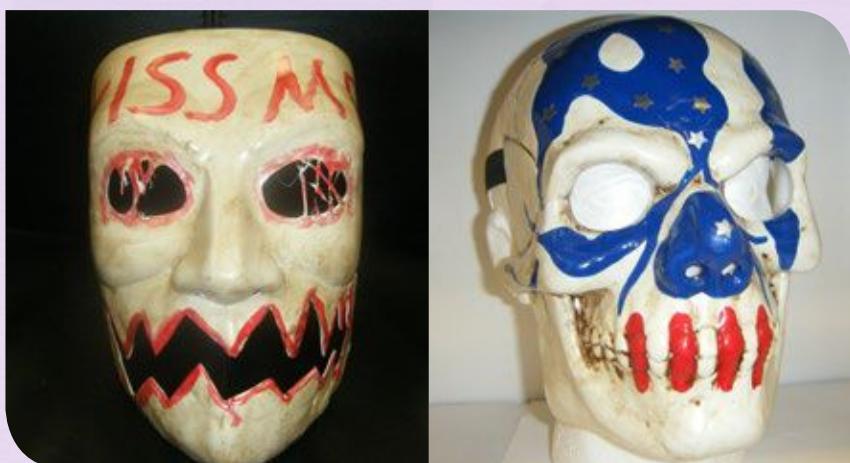
FINDING DORY SNOW GLOBE - £65
AVAILABLE FROM DISNEYSTORE.CO.UK



CHAOTIC COSPLAY

Another year, another time for the annual purge, as James DeMonaco's third film in the murderous near future-set series, **The Purge: Election Year** comes around. So to celebrate, you could always throw either a purge party - though that didn't work out so well in the films, so perhaps not - or get your early Halloween costumes ready. If you are an avid cosplayer (which we love here at STARBURST - see Cosplay Catwalk on page 109), here is an idea for your next outfit. Available from user [toysandmasks](http://toysandmasks.com) on ebay.co.uk, these two frightening and unhinged looking masks are awesome replications of those worn by anarchic purgers in the new film. We particularly love the stars and stripes skull - very patriotic, or should that be psychotic?

THE PURGE 3 KISS ME MASK AND THE PURGE 3 ELECTION YEAR MASK - BOTH £25.99
BOTH AVAILABLE FROM EBAY.CO.UK



STARBURST: EVENT PROFILE



WORDS: ED FORTUNE
PHOTOS: MIKE SMITH

BIRMINGHAM COMICS FESTIVAL Edgbaston Stadium, The County Ground, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B5 7QU 23rd April 2016

Last year, the inaugural Birmingham Comics Festival really impressed us by being a tightly organised and incredibly fun event dedicated to comics first and foremost. This year, it was held at Birmingham's spacious Edgbaston Stadium and saw an improvement in terms of content and organisation, proving that good events continually improve. 2016's event proved it's here to stay and hopefully for a very long time.

Comics are one of the most powerful forms of media we have; they have a unique flexibility and accessibility that simply

can't be matched. It shouldn't surprise anyone that stories that originated in comic book form now dominate popular culture. In the rush to embrace all things comic-related however, much has been lost in the stampede; many so-called comic conventions cover everything that comics inspire, except for the comics themselves. 2016's Birmingham Comics Festival fills the gap; it pushes sequential art first and allows all the things it inspires to follow, making for a coherent and rather packed affair.

The day began before you even got through the main doors. Outside the entrance were replica cars from various genre movies. There's something odd about getting to pose next to Mad Max's Interceptor. Car thieves never stood a chance, however, as the entrance was patrolled by Mega-City One's finest, or to put it another way, a collection of local Judge Dredd-inspired cosplayers having a great time showing off their excellent costumes.

The main hall area was utterly packed

with some of the UK's finest independent comic creators. Indie labels (familiar to regular readers of this magazine) such as Accent UK, FutureQuake, Hellbound Media, Markosia, and Time Bomb comics were all on display, each with new books for fans to dive into. Of particular interest was Steve Tanner's latest offering, the 18th century swashbuckling book *Flintlock*. Though merchandise, T-shirts and those ubiquitous Funko dolls were on sale from various stalls, the real focus of the floor was comics. Those venturing all the way to the back of hall were greeted by a large replica of Batman's 'Tumbler' Batmobile, as well as a host of comics artists and writers. Unlike some of the UK's larger comic events, Birmingham is just the right size, meaning that various creators aren't so busy that they don't have time to chat. Comic book creator superstars such as Dan Abnett, D'Israeli, and David Hine were all around to catch up with and find out what they were up to next.

Upstairs was more of the same; a brightly lit open space packed with creators



and their wares. One of these areas was instead dedicated to comics fandom - props, cosplayers and so on. In addition to the now mandatory Iron Throne, there were plenty of places to chill out and pose. The event drew cosplayers from across the UK. A related attraction was Midland's Body Paint Cosplay area; this was a zone in which costumes were quite literally being sprayed onto very patient models. The painstaking results were pretty stunning, though the crowd of those watching the process did slow down the flow of people in that area.

This year's event mostly used the space more effectively; last year we had multiple panels in smaller spaces. This year more exhibitors were given more room, and there was only one room for panels. This was a good sized space, and the tighter focus meant that the panels were better managed and more engaging. The topics were pretty wide and varied. Highlights included an examination into the differences between the UK and US comics industry, which threw up some fascinating insights, as did the rather fun chat about collaboration in comic books, which somewhat pitted writers against artists.

The event was properly rounded off with an inevitable cosplay competition. It was slowed down slightly by space management issues (and the need to announce each costume), but the outfits and the sense of fun more than made up for this.

Ultimately, it's the attendees that make an event, and Birmingham Comics Festival did everything in its power to make things a bit easier for the general public. There was a little something for all sorts of geeks, from the huge roaming families of nerds to the stereotypical loner. This is a small but perfectly formed comics event bringing together fans both new and experienced to enjoy comics. It's something a bit special, and we can't wait till next year.

For more information, and to keep up to date with next year's event, head over to thecomicfestival.com.



PAUL MOUNT'S



This month, we book into BATES MOTEL for more fun and games with Norma and Norman and praise the Lord for the first episode of AMC's PREACHER...

It's looking as if 2016 is going to be one hell of a year in the TV Zone. The line between TV broadcast and streaming has become increasingly blurred and this year's already delivered a veritable embarrassment of riches with shows like *The Man in the High Castle*, *Mr Robot*, *Daredevil* and *11-22-63* defying even our best expectations and offering us TV shows that redefine the medium and how it tells us its stories. I try to kick this column off every month with a look at something new; a TV virgin taking its first faltering steps into the sometimes unforgiving glare of critical scrutiny and there's such an abundance of new material being generated across so many platforms I sometimes feel I'm a bit spoilt for choice in deciding what to lead off with every month. This issue, though, just for a change – and as this is my last column for the time being – I'm breaking my own self-imposed rule and returning to a show I've kept the faith with across three seasons, a show which, this year, has finally joined that pantheon of series which are or have become virtually flawless and, with the wind in the right direction, can easily qualify as stone-cold modern TV classics. So it is that this year *Bates Motel* joins the likes of Seasons Two to Five of *Breaking Bad* and a couple of early *Dexter* seasons (and possibly even *11-22-63*) as genuine televisual masterworks, pitch-perfect, beautifully judged and realised entertainment that is almost beyond significant criticism.

Bates Motel is a show that has always been dominated and powered by two characters and two performances. Created as a prequel to Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 shocker *Psycho* (I'm now way beyond caring that the series is set fifty-odd years after the events

of the movie – sometimes you gotta move on) *Bates Motel* has, at its core, focused on the teenage Norman Bates (Freddie Highmore) and his widowed Mom Norma (Vera Farmiga – look up the word 'vivacious' in any dictionary and you'll likely find a picture of My Vera... sorry, Vera) as they put their troubles behind them and try to start a new life running a slightly downbeat motel in a 'where-the-hell-is-this-place?' fictional coastal resort in an extremely rainy Oregon. Previous seasons have seen Norma and Norman struggling to fit in, to put on a brave face despite the unending turmoil of their lives – Norman's slowly deteriorating mental

condition and Norma's desperate, tireless determination to stand by him and do the right thing. Other characters and story strands have drifted throughout the series but they've always been peripheral deviations from the two people we've really come here to see. *Bates Motel*, never less than utterly watchable, had a tendency to drift a bit when Norma and Norman weren't at the eye of the storm, the heart of the drama.

Season Four sees *Bates Motel* finally setting its sights on its ultimate goal – positioning its main characters exactly where they need to be to lead into the events of the movie. So this year, across ten punishingly good episodes, Norma and Norman have been absolutely front and centre in each and every episode with pretty much nothing else getting in the way to shift our attention from their morbid, unhealthy and – as we know – ultimately disastrous relationship. This year, Norma finally had to accept that Norman has mental health problems which can no longer be swept aside or brushed under one of the Motel's dusty carpets. She manages to get him committed to the Pineview Institution, an out-of-town facility with an impressive success rate where he can be treated, as a potentially long-term inmate, by the friendly Dr Edwards. But Pineview costs big bucks and Norma doesn't have any. She eventually persuades her old sparring partner Sheriff Alex Romero (Nestor Carbonell) to marry her so she can use his insurance policy to pay for Norman's treatment. But to their mutual surprise, the union quickly becomes more than just a convenience and the pair realise they have true feelings for one another. Norma is suddenly, achingly, blissfully happy and she and Alex make plans for their future. But what about Norman, fuming and furious at being hidden away in Pineview and plotting a way he can get back to his





BATES MOTEL

mother's side? He's not too pleased when he discovers not only that his mother has married the Sheriff but also that she claims to be in love with him...

Despite the presence of other cast members, Season Four is really pretty much a two-hander between Farmiga (she executive produces the show) and Highmore (he wrote Episode Eight), who have raised the bar stratospherically high with their performances this year. Here are two actors utterly and impeccably absorbed by and immersed in their characters; their respective screen presences make for electrifying television. Farmiga's joy in the potential for a new life with Romero (and possibly without Norman as the be-all and end-all of her existence?) is extraordinarily poignant, mainly because we know – and our hearts sink at the realisation of it – that her happiness can really only ever be short-lived. Highmore's

Norman is sly malevolence personified; only an actor of his calibre could imbue an apparently innocuous enquiry like "When will you be home, mother?" with such rich, unspoken threat and menace. Although the show's dominated by the Farmiga/Highmore double-whammy, Carbonell's swarthy, likable Romero has matched them blow for blow this year, creating a new dynamic for the series and its relationships even though he has his own behind-closed-doors secrets which, as the series progresses, look set to cause even more heartbreak and misery for Norma.

If there's been a problem with Season Four, it's that it's inevitably had to sideline its supporting characters. Norma's other, saner son Dylan (Max Thieriot) has had next to nothing to do this year except moon over his girlfriend Emma (Olivia Cooke), who's finally had a life-saving lung transplant and whose mother mysteriously

disappeared after a visit to Bates Motel and an encounter with Norman. Minor quibbles, though, for a show so intricately plotted and smartly scripted, which, in its penultimate episode, did the unthinkable (spoiler warning!) Norman, unwilling to share his mother with anyone else, tried to kill them both by blocking all the hotel's air vents and flooding his mother's bedroom with carbon monoxide. Romero arrives in what might appear to be the nick of time but... well, let's just say there have been no *Walking Dead*-style cop-out endings here...

Where next for **Bates Motel** as it gears up for its fifth and final season next year? This is a show with a very clearly defined narrative trajectory and it's far too classy a proposition to outstay its welcome and stretch its credibility to breaking point; we're very clearly coming towards the endgame now. What's been done this year can't be undone and there are sure to be repercussions for everyone following the thunderous events of the Season Four finale, which sees Norman well on his way to becoming the psychopath we first met in Robert Bloch's 1959 novel and, more famously, Hitchcock's movie the following year. I was an extremely vocal sceptic when **Bates Motel** was announced back in 2012 – where are *all the new ideas??* – but as the series has matured (and, in all honesty, I was pretty much hooked from the very first episode) it's shown how it's possible to do something genuinely intelligent and creative with what might be termed as a 'vintage property' (unlike A&E's aimless and pointless *Damien* series, dumped after just one ten-episode season) turning a timeless movie classic into what's destined to become a respectful, thoughtful modern-day TV classic. **Bates Motel** is open for business for just one more year; my bags are packed and I'm ready to check in.



BATES MOTEL

ALSO SCREENING



DARK MATTER - SEASON TWO

Second run for the sci-fi romp set aboard a mysterious space vessel crewed and operated by a bunch of complete strangers.

From July 4th on Syfy UK.

MR ROBOT - SEASON TWO

One of the most acclaimed new dramas of 2015, starring Rami Malek as an intense young computer hacker enlisted by the mysterious 'Mr Robot' (Christian Slater) and his team of digital anarchists, returns for its eagerly anticipated second season.

From July 14th on Amazon Prime Instant Video.

ZOO - SEASON TWO

Or, When Animals Go Bad! The second run of the eco-thriller from the book by James Patterson sees humanity on the backfoot as the world's fauna begins to cause chaos across the planet.

From July on Sky One.



PREACHER

PREACHER

I've never really been in the habit of passing judgement on a show on the basis of its first episode – that's never been the point of this column, which prefers to take a step back and look at the bigger picture rather than indulging in the minutia of individual episodes. But hey, I'm feeling demob happy and it's time to break another rule; plus, I couldn't really take my temporary leave of the Zone without saying a few words about AMC's *Preacher*, only the first episode of which has screened at the time of writing. Fact is, this is clearly a show which is going to be too good, and too damned *important*, for me to not throw my hat into the critical ring as soon as possible.

So, some first impressions – bearing in mind I'm not (yet) familiar with the source material, the acclaimed comic book series created by Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon, although in the run-up to the start of the series I vaguely became aware that there's a lot of swearing and violence in the comic and that it also features a character known as Arse-Face. On the basis of the first episode, it's fair to conclude that there ain't that much swearing (early days, mind), though there is a lot of wonderfully graphic and magnificently outre violence, and there's a character who has a face like an arse and thus, I can only assume, is the infamous Arse-Face. Whether the episode (and those that will have now followed) accurately represents the comic is of little concern to me; this is a different medium, I'd expect changes, but I appreciate that comics fans aren't always as forgiving. They want to see their beloved comic on the screen just as it was on the printed page, which, in some ways, sort of defeats the object in making a TV version. I'm all in favour of a bit of creative licence, as long as it's more creative than... err... licence. Some of my sources tell me that episode one of *Preacher* was remarkably true to the comic, others have said they didn't recognise much of it.

Who can tell? Personally, I have no real idea exactly what I've just watched but I already know I'm with this one for the duration.

Dominic Cooper (most recently seen as the young Howard Stark in Fox's already much-mourned *Agent Carter*) plays troubled minister Jess Custer in the modern-day dustbowl Texas town of Anville, a town populated by any number of slightly weird, off-kilter people. Jesse clearly has a dark past and he's rapidly losing his faith. Meanwhile, something from outer space makes an enforced landing in Africa and inhabits a preacher who promptly explodes (we're later told that Tom Cruise has similarly exploded at a scientology rally – cheeky). Boozy Irish vampire Cassidy (Joseph Gilgun) arrives spectacularly in Anville after an explosive fight on board a plane and Tulip (Negga), Custer's ex, also turns up after winning her own private – and no less spectacular – battles. There are also some mysterious figures out on the road who are clearly tracking down Custer for reasons we're not yet privy to. Oh, and one of the town's families has a son with a face like an arse...

Quite what all this means and where it's all heading, I have absolutely no idea. But I was utterly captivated by this intoxicating stew of ideas and visuals, subtly and imaginatively realised by directors Seth Rogen (yes, that Seth Rogen) and Evan Goldberg with just the right mix of wry wit, comic book audacity and, in places, high melodrama. Potentially scary stuff, too; the scene towards the end of the episode in which Custer is confronted in his own church by a shapeless, shivering entity which proceeds to hurl itself into his body made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. Which reminds me – must shave the back of my neck...

It's not often, even these days where we're genuinely spoilt by an apparently unending stream of high quality high concept shows and series, or by something new that comes along and completely grabs my attention virtually from the first frame. But *Preacher* has caught me hook, line, and sinker and I've a feeling the weekly wait between episodes – there are another nine to come in this first season – is going to become something pretty damned close to unbearable.

What a time to be a TV Zoner. +

Hey, I'm outta here for a few months and will be hopefully spending some time doing things entirely unconnected with watching hour after hour of telly. I will, however, be wandering the corridors of the *STARBURST* Film Festival in August like some square-eyed creature of the night; please feel free to stop and say 'hi' and, if you wish, ply me with alcohol. If you're a *Doctor Who* fan – no violence please, I'm a pacifist. *STARBURST*'s Mr Andrew Pollard will be in charge of the Zone in my absence and has promised to keep the place spick and span and free from spiders. But don't go down into the cellar, Andrew. Just don't...

Contact me via the magic of email at paul.mount@starburstmagazine.com or do the Twitter thing @PMount

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it's only a movie

a column by JORDAN ROYCE

As another very busy month in the world of **STARBURST** Magazine draws to a close, it seriously feels like 2016 has been more than eventful already, without even reaching the halfway point.

Thankfully the **STARBURST International Film Festival** website was finally launched this month and tickets went on sale. It has to be said that the venue is superb. The **Manchester Metropolitan University Students Union Complex** (yes, it is in Manchester) was the perfect fit for an event that I had been working on behind the scenes for some time. The event taking place from Friday 26th to Sunday 28th August 2016 needed somewhere special, and this gaff was built for the job. The festival will be a three-day celebration of all things **STARBURST** and genre, with talent both from in front of and behind the cameras there to spend the weekend with us. Large screenings, fringe events and curiosities are sure to abound across the three floor complex, with simply too many events to go into with this modest word count. I strongly advise thee to seek out www.starburstfilmfest.co.uk to find out more. We will bring you more as we make regular announcements with confirmed bookings. Culminating in the **STARBURST Fantasy Awards 2016**, this will be a mighty weekend, and you get to spend it with me and the gang – so get some tickets and **BE THERE...**

As I stated earlier, 2016, whilst not being the crowd-pleasing monster that 2015 turned out to be, has been eventful all the same, with Marvel Studios finally facing some attempts to take away their comic book movie domination. Whilst the

abysmal **Batman V Superman** was an easy dispatch via the schooling given to DC by the conversely incredible **Captain America: Civil War**, which

provided the perfect template for a darker take on proceedings that can also equally entertain. **Deadpool** did make some inroads, managing to clean up at the box office with a refreshing blast of irreverence. Being loosely connected to the **X-Men** franchise, did this foreshadow that X would mark the only spot of competition for Marvel this year?

Sadly, the latest X-plots (sorry!) of Mr Singer's gifted youngsters don't even come close to giving Marvel any sleepless nights, having pretty much failed to evolve in any way from the sort of superhero fare we had to be content with in the '90s when we had almost sorted out the special effects, but no-one seemed to be able to deal with writing for so many complex characters interacting within a team environment. To give credit where credit is due, **X-Men: Apocalypse** is better than the mess that was **X-Men: Days of Future Past**, a movie that hoodwinked blinkered followers of boy fan Bryan Singer into believing that it was an opus. One that encompassed two generations of mutant kind, rather than a smoke and mirrors routine that passed off a bunch of extended cameos, and phoned-in performances as much more than the sum of its parts. I did sort of enjoy **X:A**, and it was a more cohesive movie (and story) than its predecessor, but it really did feel like a retro experience in terms of screenwriting and direction. It simply felt like much of the time no-one involved knew what to do with so many characters – Just like the bad old days.

The story is refreshingly straightforward, and could have allowed for some major developing of the cast, and mythos. **Apocalypse** wants to rule the world and is all powerful way back in 3600 BCE (rather than that pesky old BC which would involve potentially offending non-mutants by referring to yet another mythical character). This allows for lots of young males to be on set dressed as classical Egyptians whilst sweating profusely (At least Bryan was probably able to get the best possible performance from *them* at least!). Poccy then ends up getting trapped under a pyramid until 1983, at which point he gets free and rounds up Storm, Magneto, cosplay favorite Psylocke, and that woesome plonker from **EastEnders** – to act as his four horsemen. Cue the current posse of **X-Men** lead by McAvoy's Professor X to halt these plans that would

horrendously inconvenience mankind by way of them not existing anymore.

Cutting to the chase, the major problem with this movie is yet another leftover from the conceited (and slightly arrogant) idea to hijack the excellently rebooted X-Verse(?) from **X-Men: First Class** and make it the prequel to a bunch of movies that were made eleven years earlier, and set four decades later. Nothing was ever going to fit properly, and despite Singer and his advice to simply go with the flow, well that doesn't cut it with me, and it shouldn't with you either. There are characters in this movie that ought to be two decades older than when we first met them, and yet they look exactly the same, a fact exacerbated by the primitive writing that provides literally no progression or development for any character during the last decade. It's a mess, and the setting of 1983 is not even properly exploited as a gimmick, merely used for a few jokes (cue entirely unauthentic conversation about **Return of the Jedi** that would never occur pre-Internet message board) and some music to sweeten up the soundtrack.

Important characters like Jubilee are fleetingly seen in costume just to be tick boxed off in the credits by fanboys. Sophie Turner can't act. Jennifer Lawrence clearly isn't keen on getting her kit off post-**Joy**, leading to another change in her persona that doesn't ring true. Havoc disappears in a really wank way like Cyclops did in **X-Men: Last Stand**. Strongest new character Psylocke has hardly any lines and zero development. Then to cap it all off, poor old Oscar Isaac has to endure a makeup job that makes him look like a poor man's Ivan Ooze from the **Power Rangers**.

Literally the only reason **X:A** and the previous flick made so much dosh is that Singer has managed a misleading Jedi mind trick and made them in a lazy way that sorta, kinda feels like their far superior Marvel Studios rivals. Once you scratch the surface, however, you are left with something that was fine fifteen years ago, but is weak sauce now that the bar has been raised.

Jordan Royce can be contacted at jordan.royce@starburstmagazine.com and hosts the **STARBURST** Radio Show every Wednesday 9pm until 11pm GMT on Fab Radio International – www.fabradiointernational.com also available on iTunes as a Podcast



Getting fingered by Bryan Singer and his extremely young friend is the last thing you need after an apocalyptic evening at the cinema...

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